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Be Yourself!

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—THE SURPRISING ADVENTURES IN
WHICH FATE INVOLVED A MILLIONAIRE BUSINESS
MAN AND HIS PROFESSIONAL DOUBLE

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RAMSEY TUFTS was heavy with secrecy as he ordered his private secretary to go into the outer office and shut the door after him. He then closed the door leading from the secretary's halfway station into his own magnificently severe private office, thus assuring himself of an additional silencer on the impending interview.

Having taken these precautions, Tufts turned nervously to Waite Burdick, his high-priced counsel, who was gazing out of the window and across the lake front in the general direction of a whaleback entering the Chicago River. Instantly the attorney dropped his affected indifference and lowered himself into a heavily padded chair. Tufts went to his desk, and from a secret drawer produced a single sheet of paper, which he thrust at the lawyer.

"Look at that!" he commanded curtly, in his strained, low voice.

Waite Burdick looked. While he does so, let us look at Ramsey Tufts.

The fact that he could summon to his office a lawyer reputed to charge one thousand dollars for every court day on a case, instead of going to the office of that legal light, epitomizes something of Ramsey Tufts's wealth and importance. He was known to millions outside of his home city as the great mail order magnate. In Chicago the impression was blurred, fogged. True, many city residents knew vaguely that there was such a person or organization, with an enormous number of employees, who evidently were needed to carry on a staggering volume of business; but there the matter ended. He was the name of a thing apart.

The explanation of this lack of local honor for a man who, if not a prophet, was certainly a profit maker, was that no person in that municipality could buy anything from Ramsey Tufts—at least, not directly. If one yearned to take advantage of his wonderful bargains, a fellow city dweller would have a country acquaintance order the goods by mail and re-ship them to Chicago. Because of this absence of contacts, Tufts was practically unknown to his neighbors.

To the rural population, on the other hand, he was more real than the League of Nations, and almost as far-reaching as the income tax. Without literary pretensions, Tufts annually put out a bulky volume which achieved a circulation of five millions and was read avidly. "Best selling" authors grew verdant with jealousy at the popularity of Tufts's tome, which was conned in farmhouses, miners' shacks, hunters' cabins, and village cottages. It was also good for shaving paper.

This book was the great Ramsey Tufts mail order catalogue. By its fascinating guidance, a ruralite could order practically anything—good articles, too. A Chicagoan waving a handful of money could not buy a thing at the great lakeside mart. That is why Republican and Democratic Postmaster-Generals nightly included in their prayers a special plea for the preservation of the man who enabled them to report such enormous sales of stamps and money orders.

Tufts watched with a strained expression while Burdick read, frowning importantly. His nervously beating hand struck a book on his desk, and he hastily shoved it under some papers. He did not want to let his expensive legal adviser see the title of this volume, which was from stock. It was a rapidly moving tale of adventure, in which a comparatively poor man won the love of a beautiful girl, despite a wealthy rival. Tufts had read many such as a part of his duty to his postage stamp clientele, and he had observed that the rich man always ran second—that is, excepting books where the leading character was the heroine. *She* usually won a man with money.

This heavy handicap on rich men had made a subtle impression on Tufts, who had always been a shy man where women were concerned.

"H-m!" grunted Burdick finally, in a judicial manner. "Seems to be a threat."

"It is a threat," snapped Tufts, who resented paying heavy retainers for non-committal grunts.

"I'd advise you to get away and go out of town for awhile, until this blows over," advised Burdick. "I can investigate its plausibility."

"You know I can't go at this time, Burdick," rasped Tufts. "Not with Barnes-Oldhind ready to snap up Binturn & Gearing if they really will clear out. Hobart Gearing may return from New York any day, and I've got Binturn where he'll sell if Gearing will. Merging their concern in mine will settle the question of supremacy between me and the Barnes-Oldhind crowd. It's a matter of pride with me."

"You are taking a risk, possibly, for a mere question of pride," accused Burdick. "Still, if you must, why not throw—what's his name?—Dorn—to the wolves for a week?"

"Thanks for the suggestion! I had already decided to do just that," replied Tufts, with a wee tinge of sarcasm. "It may be a bit hard on him, and I like Dorn; but—the survival of the fittest. Look out for No. 1, because nobody else will!"

"Will you warn him?" demanded the lawyer. "Will you explain to him?"

"I'm afraid he might quit, and I could hardly blame him," admitted Tufts. "Dorn has done admirably. He's a nice fellow, and all that—everything to suit my need; but I never before had to put up to him the possibility of—"

"Risking his life," finished the attorney, as Tufts hesitated.

"It may be only a bluff," protested the mail order magnate uneasily, although he had nodded. "I'll tell him to be careful."

"After all, he might as well justify his existence," soothed Burdick. "This is probably only a bluff; but, if it isn't, a decoy can bring them out from cover. If he's any good, he can easily take care of himself."

Having stifled the silent protests of their better natures, the two men discussed matters for a few minutes more. Then the lawyer left, distinctly uncomfortable in mind. Waite Burdick, bred to the law and named after a Chief Justice of the United States, had been a dignified business attorney since admission to the bar, and he did not accommodate himself easily to a situation calling for an experienced criminal lawyer. He left behind an equally dis-

turbed merchandiser who had spent the whole of his adult life in an office, and who was utterly bewildered when out of the depths of big business, where he was an enormous frog.

Having ushered the lawyer out, Tufts pressed a button concealed on his desk. After a minute's pause, a green light winked in one eye of a bronze owl set on his bookcase. Making sure that the door to his secretary's anteroom was locked, he crossed to the other side of his office and unlocked the connecting door.

Framed in the doorway stood a man. For a moment the two stared silently at each other. The scene was like one of those clever specimens of double exposure turned out by the motion picture studios. Facing Ramsey Tufts, quietly waiting his explanation for the summons, was—to the casual gaze—his perfect image.

This was Philip Dorn, the secret "double" of Ramsey Tufts.

II

"COME in, Dorn," invited Tufts, motioning toward his desk.

"No—you had better come in here, where I can watch my signals," corrected this unusual employee. "The door is locked. Any moment I may receive a flash."

Nodding curtly, Tufts entered. His double, who had just countermanded the magnate's politely veiled order, looked at him inquiringly.

Philip Dorn's job was unique. His employer had borrowed the idea from the moving pictures already mentioned.

Tufts had nourished his giant business from its infancy. His was the directing genius. He believed that his personality was the big factor in his success, and he proved it. His mail clients were always welcome to meet him. During his climb he had commanded that no out-of-town customer who asked to see him should be denied. When the appreciative rural purchaser expressed a wish to behold the genius who supplied him with everything he ordered by mail, Tufts would breeze out to shake hands, thereby making a booster.

Tufts had a way with him which put personality into what otherwise would be merely an exchange of merchandise for postal orders. Customers went away pleased, and broadcast the fact that they had shaken hands with the great Tufts.

This provided incalculably convincing and valuable advertising.

Eventually, however, the business had increased to such staggering size, and the number of customers had multiplied so vastly, that it became a physical impossibility for Tufts to greet personally even the proportionately few who asked for him weekly. Although he had delegated authority intelligently as his business grew, it was his creature, and required his constant direction.

Faced with the alternative of neglecting his business or refusing to meet visiting customers, Tufts acted with decision and originality. Confidential agents were entrusted with the task of finding a double who could impersonate him acceptably for the brief social contacts with the customers who called at his office. The search, conducted for months in the quietest and most careful way, produced Philip Dorn.

At the time when he was chosen, Dorn was a stock company character actor whose career had been ended, or at least retarded, by an affection of the vocal cords. This reduced the range of his voice to a low, strained conversational tone which closely resembled that of Ramsey Tufts. Physically he was almost a counterpart of Tufts; and, being an apt copyist of mannerisms, he had strengthened the resemblance. He had carefully cultivated side whiskers like those that grew naturally on Tufts's cheeks. During business hours the two men wore duplicate clothes.

Dorn was thirty-five, but a touch of gray at his temples, and some artful aids to nature, enabled him to meet his employer's age halfway. Tufts was fifty-five, but looked little more than forty. He had kept young because he had enjoyed his early-won success. His household staff included a masseur, who was a disguised male beauty expert, and who, in the privacy of the Tufts mansion, daily worked on the mail order king's face.

In short, Dorn's entire task consisted in being Tufts to outward appearance; and he succeeded.

Tufts opened his mouth to state his wishes, when Dorn raised a silencing hand and pointed toward his light signal.

"Party of visitors waiting," he announced. "I'll be back in five minutes."

Waiting only for Tufts to return to his own office and close the door, Dorn went the opposite way, into his own outer office.

The signal meant that a party of customers from various R. F. D. routes had been conducted through the building by a guide, who had exhibited to them the system which converted mail lists into packages of outbound merchandise. A catalogue worm had ventured a bashful desire to meet Mr. Tufts, and others had echoed that laudable ambition.

The guide had replied that while Mr. Tufts was a very busy man, his orders were to break in on him at any time if a customer asked for him. Deftly he had distributed cards to be filled out with the names and addresses of the visitors. These cards had been turned over to a dazzlingly beautiful girl at the information desk, who had shot them into a pneumatic tube, announcing in clear, penetrating soprano:

"Mr. Tufts is in conference, but will be out in a few minutes."

After five minutes had intensified the customers' interest, an unlettered door suddenly opened, disclosing a brisk man with a beaming face framed in neat sideboards and shell-rimmed spectacles. His entry was nothing short of dramatic. Calling out the names of persons waiting, he pounced on the delighted visitors, mentioned their home towns, and inquired about specific purchases they had made in the past. References to past meetings gave intimacy to these greetings.

After half a dozen old customers had been stricken almost numb with pleasure, self-introductions became general. If Addison Simms, of Seattle, had been there, he would have been pleased.

Excusing himself at the end of five minutes, the genial greeter invited all present to sign the guest book, receive the new catalogue, and depart for a free ride on the Tufts sight-seeing bus for visitors. Then he bowed himself out. That was Dorn in action.

The visitors, of course, would go away to spread the news that Ramsey Tufts was a prince with a perfectly marvelous memory. Even doubters couldn't scoff that he just pretended to know them after looking at their cards; for how did he remember their previous calls and the things they had bought? The explanation would have disclosed a closely guarded system originated by Tufts and burbanked by Dorn.

When the visitors' cards were shot by tube to the outer room of Dorn's suite, six silent and efficient assistants swiftly

searched the perfect card index files. Some outstanding fact, particularly a prior visit, was noted on each card where available. Dorn, who had joined his staff promptly at the signal, memorized names and facts at a glance.

For the rest, he relied on inspiration and quick observation. When he called a name, its owner invariably betrayed himself by some sign familiar to this expert. The pleased customers were never critical or suspicious. Even when he made a mistake, which was seldom, a friendly voice always put him right.

"Something out there impressed me as odd," reported Dorn, when he and Tufts were again isolated from the rest of the plant. "A fellow in that party said he was a farmer from down State. We have no record of any such name, and I could see that his hands were soft. He wore village store clothes, but he looked to me like a city roughneck. I wonder why he wanted to look you over!"

With difficulty Tufts suppressed a shiver. His face took on a look of decision.

"Dorn, for business reasons of my own, I want it to appear that I have left town for a week or two," he announced. "Be ready to start in an hour. Go out this way, and I'll use your door to leave. My car will take you down to the yacht landing, where you will go aboard the *What Cheer*. I will telephone Captain Larsen to expect me, and leave it to you to keep him in the dark. You will meet Leonard Binturn on board. He has agreed to take a cruise with me, stipulating that any reference to business is absolutely barred. That just suits our purposes. If he violates that agreement, you ignore what he says so pointedly that he'll quit. You will cruise to Mackinac. I'll see you in an hour."

Returning to the privacy of his office, Tufts took out the sheet of paper that he had handed to his lawyer, and reread:

Tufts, you sealed your doom when you contributed that twenty-five thousand dollars to the Anti-Crime Organization. We are going to get you.
NEVER MIND WHO.

III

FOR several minutes the mail order king stared at the typewritten words as if fascinated. They were inscribed on a plain sheet of paper, of a brand for sale at any stationery store. In fact, Tufts sold that same paper himself. A stamped govern-

ment envelope had inclosed the threatening missive.

Tufts had examined both envelope and paper under a magnifying glass, without finding any finger-prints. Although he knew that experts could identify a particular typewriter by a sample of its work, if allowed to examine all the machines in the city, he did not believe that the one on which this threat was written would be available for examination. It was probably hidden in what he vaguely thought of as "the underworld." Moreover, he did not care to have detectives nosing into his private troubles.

What the letter referred to was clear enough. Although he studiously obscured his personality in his own city, Tufts contributed to local charities and reform funds, always stipulating anonymity. Annually he had contributed twenty-five thousand dollars to the Anti-Crime Organization, which existed ostensibly to war on local lawbreaking, as well as to accelerate police activity against criminals and vice. After ten years of veiled support to this cause, his heavy contributions had recently been made public through an internal quarrel in the organization, an ousted treasurer having given to the press the names of the anonymous donors.

Chagrined, Tufts had scratched that organization from his list of beneficiaries. He had no desire to invite the personal hostility of the vague but apparently numerous horde of lawbreakers who terrorized timid citizens.

However, the damage had been done. To prove that, here was the threatening letter. It had been brought in to him hesitantly by his colorless personal secretary, Langley. He had apologized for passing it along to his employer, but had quavered that he had not dared to take the responsibility of keeping Mr. Tufts in ignorance of the anonymous threat. On reading it, Tufts had snorted disdainfully, and had cast it into the wastebasket. He retrieved it as soon as Langley made his exit, and later had summoned Burdick, as already told.

With a sigh the magnate hid the letter in the secret drawer, and called for his secretary.

"Telephone Captain Larsen to be ready to leave when I come aboard at five o'clock this afternoon," the mail order king ordered. "Tell him I'm not to be bothered

with any further questions, as I want quiet to concentrate. The boat is to reach Mackinac Island to-morrow noon. He can expect another man on board before I arrive. Have our publicity director take a paragraph to the newspapers announcing that I'm going on a week's cruise up the lake. Make out a personal check for ten thousand, and get me the money in large denominations."

On the other side of the connecting door, Dorn was saying:

"I am going away this afternoon for a week's cruise, or possibly two weeks. Explain this to any visitors."

"Certainly, Mr. Tufts," replied the chief assistant.

His information staff believed that he was Tufts. So closely was the secret guarded that only two or three men close to Tufts knew of his double. Their offices adjoined, to permit change of place, and the employees supposed that there was only one big suite with two exits. Tufts used a private elevator, and left by the Boulevard entrance. Dorn descended by a separate side elevator to a door leading to the cross street. Thus their comings and goings were never duplicated, to arouse the suspicion of the employees.

At the end of an hour Dorn rejoined his employer.

"Here's a couple of thousand," said Tufts, handing him a roll of bills. "You may need it. Leonard Binturn doesn't gamble, as far as I know, but you never can tell when it might break out on a man, and I don't want any checks floating around."

He took a long, plain envelope from his desk and gave it to his double.

"This contains five thousand dollars," he went on. "Deliver it personally to the chief of police, as my anonymous contribution to the police hero fund. Insist on seeing him alone in his private office, and impose absolute secrecy regarding the reason of your call; but be open about going there and sending in my name. You've met him before, as me, and he'd probably pick you as me if he had to choose between us. Refuse to say anything to reporters. Then drive to the club landing and go aboard. I will put up at your place to-night. That will obviate notifying your housekeeping couple. Let's see—their name is Huth. Let's go!"

When the connecting door had been

locked, Dorn walked through to Tufts's outer office and handed his kit bag to Langley. After the secretary had placed it in the limousine, Dorn waved him back and ordered the chauffeur to drive to the police chief's office. There he concluded his business in a fog of secrecy, as ordered.

City editors who had just been notified of Tufts's cruise received telephone reports from their City Hall men that the mail order king had visited the police chief on a mysterious errand. It might be interpreted by an underworld spy as a visit to ask for extra police protection; and such was precisely Tufts's idea.

When the limousine slid smoothly upon the yacht club landing, Dorn glanced back. A taxicab had halted near by, and its fare hastily ducked behind a newspaper. Dorn's quick, trained glance caught a flash of the man's face. Although a cap had replaced the country style slouch hat, Dorn was sure that the passenger was the soft-handed person who had pretended to be a farmer when he called at Tufts's office.

Before he could step out, the taxi wheeled and darted back, heading toward a general landing place—a public pier. What did it all mean?

IV

RAMSEY TUFTS made his exit through Dorn's "information" suite, acknowledging the respectful "good nights" of his staff with a silent nod. He was thoroughly familiar with all the necessary facts of Dorn's life and daily routine, which he himself had prescribed. After leaving by the side entrance, he walked westward for a block, and hailed a taxi. *En route* to Dorn's apartment, he thought over the ruse he had devised to divert the attention of any one who had violent designs on him. He was certain that the police chief had been deceived along with the rest.

While the hiring of a double had been primarily for rural visitors, there had been urban appearances. Whenever Tufts was drafted on a reception committee to greet some distinguished guest, he had Dorn pinch hit for him. Philip had substituted for his boss at public dinners, occasionally delivering a speech, for which Tufts supplied the opinions, while his double furnished the words. These occasions, however, were rare, as neither original nor copy had a good speaking voice.

Lest it be protested that such a mas-

querade would be impossible in this day of alert illustrated newspapers, let it be reiterated that Tufts was as much separated from his home city as was his business. A bachelor, he avoided social and public functions, and was not in the public eye. Old pictures of him might be found in volumes of "Successful Men," or in newspaper "morgues," but he never furnished any reason for printing them. Bookish, secluded in his home and business life, he had few social contacts outside of a small and exclusive circle of commercial mammoths of his own size. He took his leisure cruising on his yacht or traveling abroad. He had no intimates.

In his own hours, Dorn was free to live as he pleased, with certain reservations. Secrecy as to his peculiar employment was stipulated, and entangling feminine alliances were forbidden. By the terms of his agreement, he could neither marry nor become engaged; but otherwise he could do as he liked.

Upon reaching his apartment, he became Philip Dorn. This was accomplished by removing his unneeded glasses, changing into livelier, younger attire, and altering his expression and the arrangement of his hair. He belonged to a golf club and to an athletic club, where he was popular among young men who were not likely to meet Tufts. Studious hours in his library were varied by livelier ones at the club, on the links, or driving his modest sedan.

Nor was he entirely denied fair company. At discreet intervals he entertained different young women at dinner, the theater, or the opera; but never the same girl too often to imperil his contract stipulation.

Ramsey Tufts felt that he was on the threshold of an interesting adventure when he entered Dorn's apartment. He was determined to live one night of the free life led by a man unburdened by wealth—such a man as the hero of the book that he carried. He had not been able to leave it at the office, for he had just reached a place where the wealthy suitor seemed to have a chance of defeating his handsome but penniless rival. Tufts wanted to find out if Cræsus ever won, for a change.

His first tingle of pleasurable reaction came when Huth, the elderly houseman, called him "Mr. Dorn" upon admitting him. Dorn lived in a good first-floor apartment in one of the comfortable, modern three-family houses near the lake shore,

above the Wilson Avenue district. This type of abode had been stipulated in their agreement—a place where Tufts could visit Dorn unobserved, if he desired.

After changing into a rather swagger sports suit from Dorn's well stocked wardrobe, Tufts laid aside his horn-rimmed spectacles. His oculist had recently told him that his vision was changing, as it does with some men of that age, and that he could soon dispense with glasses. Tufts surveyed himself in a pier glass.

"H-m! Rather a snappy chap," he thought.

Over an appetizing if lonely dinner, he considered pleasantly whether or not he would drive Dorn's car around on one of those evenings of adventure which impecunious young men enjoyed in books. Later, perhaps, he decided, for just then he was anxious to read his story and learn if the wealthy suitor finally turned the trick. With scarcely a glance at the tasteful and comfortable furnishings of the apartment, he settled himself in an easy chair under a reading lamp. From a humidor he extracted a soft, excellently shaped cigar of rich tan. It proved rather stronger than those he sparingly smoked, but he enjoyed its kick. Sighing blissfully, he sank down to revel in the story.

When the telephone bell rang, he noted with a start that the desk clock indicated a quarter to ten, his usual bedtime. Wealth had gone down to defeat in a gripping finale, and the poor man was figuring in the clinch. Tufts blinked out of his absorption as the bell continued to ring. He answered the telephone, primly announcing the number.

"Is this Philip Dorn?" inquired a rich contralto.

"Er—yes. Dorn speaking," stammered Tufts, wondering why this unknown voice had upset his habitual calm. It was an intriguing voice, one with which the owner could do tricks.

"What's the matter with your voice? It sounds strange," said the unseen speaker. "Oh, I remember! That's what retired you, of course—your wheezy pipes. This is Phil Dorn, formerly of Bard's Stock, isn't it?"

"Ye-es," admitted Tufts, remembering the fact that that was Dorn's last theatrical engagement.

"Phil, this is Loraine Cuyler," thrilled the thrilling voice.

There were intriguing qualities in those tones, also something that hinted of danger to the apprehensive Tufts. He was stricken dumb, trying to think what to say to draw out a little information to guide him. There was an uncomfortable pause. Then the unknown said:

"Loud applause. You sound delighted to hear from me!"

Mockery was in the tone—gentle reproach, too.

"Aren't you glad to hear my voice, Phil?" she inquired.

"Why, yes, certainly. Surely—er—Lorraine," protested Tufts weakly.

"Delighted to hear your hearty invitation!" mocked the voice with the smile. "Landed in town to-night cleaned, and can't raise a soul I know. I was looking through the phone book for Edna Dorman's number when I struck your name just as I remembered that Ed married somebody whose name escapes my memory. Remembering what a good pal you were, with no sentimental nonsense, I took a chance. Why are you such a chilly old pill? Haven't got a wife there, have you?"

"Heavens, no!" gasped Tufts.

"That being the case, and seeing you don't offer to come down town," continued his interlocutor, "I'll run up right away. Expect me!"

"Wait! Hold on a min—" began Tufts, but the deadness of the wire told him that the other instrument had been hung up.

Here was a how-do-you-do! A strange woman descending on him and believing him to be Dorn!

For a minute he was bewildered. Then the happy thought struck him that this was just the sort of thing which happened to the poor heroes he had always envied. It sounded interesting.

Another idea sent him rummaging through Dorn's bookcase and dresser. Ten minutes' search unearthed the scrap book that every actor keeps. A feverish examination of clippings and old programs disclosed Loraine Cuyler's picture. If she was anything like her photograph—well, he was glad he hadn't forbidden her the house.

There was only time enough to order the Huths to remain in their suite at the rear of the house, when the doorbell rang. Wondering how he should greet his visitor, what to say or do, Tufts opened the door. No opportunity was given him to do anything. Before him was an alluring vision, for an

instant; then there was a sudden rush, and he was vehemently kissed.

V

"THAT'S for nothing," quoted this astounding visitor, when Tufts fell back, gaping dazedly at her. It would state the case mildly to say that he was dumfounded plus. Staring at the stricken man, she changed her tone to a husky one, assuring him: "That's all there is. There isn't any more."

Tufts recognized that line. He attended the theater occasionally, and had seen most of the leading performers, and he identified this as one of the countless imitations of Ethel Barrymore. Still he gaped.

"Don't die in the house," entreated Miss Cuyler, a bit provoked by this reception. "Be yourself, Phil! Don't take that smack seriously, as some balloon-tired business man would. You haven't been out of the profession so long that you've forgotten that it didn't mean anything but 'glad to see you again'—or have you? I almost think you're not glad to see me!"

"Delighted," he managed to articulate.

And who would not be? Here was a fascinating woman in the ripe, full beauty of thirty or thereabout. Black as India ink was the bobbed hair which she wore in a myriad of delicious little curls. Her eyebrows and eyes were of the same midnight black, while her lips were red, and curled in a mocking little quirk. After fifty-five years of single blessedness, Tufts swayed back from the impact of her charm. This woman had come to his apartment late at night! It was like a play.

"Don't break down and cry with delight," she entreated, still mockingly. "Won't I be seated? For a moment, if you insist. What's the matter, Phil? Be yourself! You know me from the past, and you needn't fear that I have any intention of vamping you. My, you have become a dry old prune! A little shaking up will do you good. I heard you'd gone into business, but I didn't know it was so fatal. Where do we go from here?"

"Beg your pardon?" inquired Tufts, bewildered.

"Out into the night," she explained. "I told you when I phoned that I'm starving in a great city—at least, since two o'clock this afternoon. I shot my entire roll to get here, having heard that a local production was casting to open Labor Day. My last

five went to the beauty parlor, and I was truly an eye-ful when I made my entrance; but the pardon came too late—or, rather, I did. My baggage assures me a roof for the night, but who wants to sleep with hunger gnawing? Inasmuch as the ravens failed to call, I called up Ravenswood and points north. Is that plain enough, or will you have words of one syllable? I crave food!"

"Certainly! Possibly I can have the housekeeper—" began Tufts, looking around for a bell to ring.

"Cut it!" ordered his visitor imperiously. "Just because I call at a bachelor's rooms at dead of night, does that mean I will dine alone with him? Not so, Jack Dalton, even if you haven't slipped the key into your pocket! Honest, Phil, if I didn't see by the furnishings that you're sitting pretty, I would take what you have; but I can see that a little stepping out won't bend you. Besides, it's a bit more proper, don't you think? I'm lonesome as well as hungry, and I anticipated several hours of nice cozy chat at some inn. You've got a car, haven't you? Good! Roll it out and we'll steer for a wayside inn where I dined one night a year ago."

Before he realized it, they were in Dorn's sedan. Nor was he going entirely against his will. Something in the night was bringing out a spirit of devilry hitherto dormant in Ramsey Tufts. He wore a cap and felt the years sliding from him.

After enduring his cautious, old-maidish driving for a mile, Loraine Cuyler took the wheel and stepped on the gas. They sped along the North Side driveway at a pace which set his blood to drumming.

"I don't know the exact location, but I can find it," she assured him. "I came this way with friends the last time I was here."

She made good on her promise, and eventually parked outside a wayside road house which flaunted the sign "Stagger Inn." Blatant, pulse quickening music blared forth. Tufts entered somewhat timidly, for he had never been in a cabaret road house at night before; but his companion had poise and assurance enough for a dozen. At her lofty request, they were ushered to a table beside the dancing floor.

"Wake up! Slip him!" whispered Loraine, as the head waiter lingered, coldly alert.

Tufts's education had progressed suf-

ficiently to instruct him to make the proper transfer from his roll, and attention promptly showered on their table.

"For a minute I thought you were rehearsing *Rip Van Winkle*," remarked Loraine. "You do need shaking up. Can I order *ad lib*?"

He nodded encouragingly. While she ordered and disposed of a good meal with a relish, talking interestingly as she ate, he glanced around. The wall panels and pillars were decorated or designed at a slant, making it appear as if every one in the place was staggering. Some were, at that. Tufts frowned thoughtfully as he saw flasks openly being emptied into tall glasses of mineral water.

"Don't you want to dance?" Loraine inquired presently. "I do, and I remember that you shook a mean foot."

Here was a detail of his impersonation of Dorn for which Tufts was not prepared. However, he met the situation promptly, saying:

"I have a sprained ankle. I don't dare strain it."

There fell a disappointed silence, from which Loraine, who had been gazing about the room, suddenly rallied. Rising, she waved invitingly toward a young couple who had been talking with the manager near the door.

"Yoo-hoo! Come on over!" she called.

Tufts cowered under the attention he feared she would attract. Apparently, however, nobody cared. It was difficult enough to attract the pair.

Finally Loraine made herself heard above the blaring of the jazz orchestra and the din of the table parties, and the pair came over. On closer inspection, the young man wasn't so young. His emaciated face ended in a bony jaw. His long, thin mouth was twisted in a sharp, knowing quirk, while clamped on a perpetual cigarette. Patent leather hair, slicked over a narrow forehead, accentuated his pallor, while shoe button eyes darted penetrating glances from under heavy black brows. He wore clothes of boisterous pattern and exaggerated cut. His companion was made up so heavily that it was difficult to determine whether she was a calcimined adolescent or a woman of thirty or more.

"Some friends I met to-day at a booking agent's," explained Loraine, as the pair sauntered up. "This is Phil Dorn, formerly of Bard's Stock—my friend, Mr.—"

"So's your old man!" jeered the fellow.

"For crying out loud!" exclaimed his companion.

This meant nothing, net, to Tufts. Loraine Cuyler concentrated a cold stare on the newcomers. The thin-faced man promptly enlightened:

"Tracy Morgan, me. The white cargo is Kit Deering. We're hoofers, with a refined act. At Kraus's agency, where we saw you, we get the 'nothing to-day,' but we hear there might be an opening here; so we came up. You just saw the manager nixing us. Waiter!"

After Morgan conferred covertly with the waiter, he caught Loraine's hopeful glance, and promptly led her out to dance. When they returned, after executing many remarkable evolutions, they were calling each other "Loraine" and "Trace." Inasmuch as Kit seemed to regard this tolerantly, Tufts did likewise. Figuratively he was in Rome, and would use the Roman guide to conduct.

His ease began slipping, however, when he got a whiff from the demi-tasses the waiter set before the newcomers. They had ordered drinks.

Ramsey Tufts was a stickler for law enforcement. Living without wide acquaintance among his fellows, he was not familiar with the widespread violation of the prohibition law. Among his big business acquaintances were habitual violators who very wisely did not mention the fact to him.

His cold stare finally penetrated Morgan's consciousness.

"What's wrong with my picture?" demanded Tracy, brushing his coat lapels and shirt front. He stared aggressively at Tufts, and then downed his drink at a gulp. Making a frightful grimace, he added: "Zowie! Some embalming fluid! Ain't you partaking?"

"No," snapped Tufts. Realizing that this sounded churlish, he amended: "Doctor's orders. You look pained."

"Terrible! Must 'a' burned out my brake lining," admitted Morgan. "Gee, that stunned me so I'll have to have another to revive me. Waiter, two more in kilts."

"Aren't you afraid?" demanded Tufts. "You can't tell where that came from."

"Oh, it's real Scotch from the worst part of Scotland," assured Morgan. "Straight from the border, but a little crooked since."

I know the crowd. Had an offer to drive a truck, too. Somebody must 'a' heard me say that if worse came to worst I could always drive a truck; but nix on chauffing one of those covered wagons! Too risky! I might get pinched for smoking cigarettes going through Zion City."

He lighted a new smoke from the glowing stub that he discarded, and signaled for the cigarette girl. From her basket he selected packs for himself, Kit, and Loraine, tossing them about the table and waving the girl grandly toward Tufts for payment. A little irritated by this small grafting, Tufts paid.

"There's danger of shooting, too, I suppose," he suggested.

"Sure! You got to use a rod too much," agreed Morgan indifferently. "Not for mine! I had enough in 1918."

"You were over there?" exclaimed Tufts.

"Me and some others," admitted Morgan. "Seventy-seventh. I was a nice little singer on big time when they promoted me to Class One. A sniff of gas took my pipes, but, thank Gawd, it didn't affect my feet. I notice you got a wheezy voice, too. Well, here's to crime!"

Gulping down his drink, he led Loraine out on the floor, to show her a little Charleston. Slender Kit moved her chair around close to Tufts and leaned her head on his shoulder.

"Sorry I'm not dancing," he apologized. "Depriving you—"

"For crying out loud!" she derided. "Does a hod carrier go into a hod carrying contest at night for pleasure? I get enough in the six-a-day not to need any when I'm reveling. Hard work, too—I'm the whole act. Forget Trace's blah about what a wow he is. Apple sauce! They tear up the seats when I strut my stuff, but he's always stealing my bows."

Tufts was mystified. Was the girl accusing her companion of some sort of theft? Being a yachtsman, he thought of boat bows, and wondered how they could be pilfered. The girl—he had decided that she was scarcely more—turned her painted face up to him, and remarked:

"You look like you might be prominent in the butter and eggs, with that flock of kale. Before they come back, can't gillette me have a sawbuck? 'Tisn't for me. A girl friend of mine is sick, and I promised to stake her the rent, or else she gets the air. Just a loan, you understand. Don't

think I got the gimmees. Slip me it under the table before Trace comes back. He'd use a vacuum cleaner on me, if he knew. We girls have trouble enough finding a place to hide it—no fooling!"

Mr. Tufts was touched—in two senses of the word. Although he did not understand much of what the girl said, he divined that she was soliciting aid for a sick friend. Under cover of the table, he peeled off a bill bearing the "XX" which he identified as a sawbuck, and slipped it to her.

"For crying out loud!" commented Kit, giving his hand a little squeeze as she disengaged the bill. From beneath the table came a muffled snap of elastic. "You're wonderful! Can't you ditch that broad and let's we two blow?"

Mr. Tufts's warm sympathy suddenly cooled off. This girl probably wasn't so unselfish, after all. His annoyance increased when Loraine and Tracy came back with another man and another girl, having changed partners during the dance. The newest newcomers pulled up chairs as if they had really been invited, the man inquiring of Tufts:

"How's the big butter and egg business doing?"

"There's some mistake. I'm not in the butter and egg business," began Tufts, puzzled by this second reference to that trade. His inquisitor laughed sarcastically.

"Be yourself!" urged Loraine.

"For crying out loud!" Kit cried aloud.

"So's your old man," declared Morgan.

Tufts could stand no more of this. He turned an appealing look to Loraine.

"S. R. O.," she remarked cryptically, to Tracy.

"Sorry you can't stay, folks," lamented Morgan, shaking the new man's hand and dragging him to his feet.

With a cynical laugh, the man and woman moved away. Tracy Morgan turned suddenly to Kit, who was unstoppering a small phial containing white tablets. He snatched at it, crying:

"Nix! Not now, or you might pass out on us!"

Kit eluded his grasp, but Morgan seized her roughly and twisted her wrist, while the girl struck wildly at him. Tufts writhed uneasily as he realized that he was being involved in a disgraceful brawl. With a shrewd, pitiless twist, the man forced the girl to release the phial, which he thrust into his pocket.

"What is it?" demanded Loraine. "Snow?"

"No—just some sleeping tablets the doc gave her for when she's wakeful," explained Morgan frankly. "Let her wait till we get to the hotel before taking it. Waiter, fill this. O. K. by you, Phil?"

From a pocket he produced a silver-plated flask, which he handed to the waiter. Then, without waiting for Tufts to confirm the order, he danced away with Loraine.

Ramsey Tufts decided that he had had enough for one night, and that he would put an end to it. When the waiter came back with the filled flask, he took it. Morgan was still dancing. Glancing about guiltily, Tufts thrust the flask into his pocket and called for the bill, which he paid.

When the dancers returned, he announced his decision. Tracy Morgan stared thoughtfully at Kit, who had fallen asleep with her head on the table.

"She didn't need powders," observed Morgan. "That Scotch put her to sleep. Give a hand, Phil—we'll drag her out. It's a good thing you got a bus!"

Tufts, who had started to help lift the sleeper, drew back at the man's cool assumption that they, too, were to ride.

At that moment a terrific uproar and fight began around the door. A man wearing a hat darted from behind, seizing Tufts and shouting:

"Over here! Here's one with a full flask!"

"A raid?" yelled Morgan to a running waiter.

"Worse than a raid!" howled the latter. "It's a pinch—that damned Anti-Crime Organization!"

VI

CAPTAIN LARSEN received Dorn on board the *What Cheer* with respectful silence, and motioned a steward to carry his bag to the owner's cabin. This was provided with everything that a yachtsman would need on the cruise. From its well stocked wardrobe Dorn selected a natty white duck suit and a gold-trimmed visored cap to match. Emerging, the perfect picture of Tufts, the millionaire yachtsman, he saw that they were putting out on a northeast course, leaving the breakwater and the municipal pier far behind.

A large gray power boat sped by to port, and soon became a vanishing speck dead

ahead. Only two men had been visible on board of it, and they had crouched low, with their faces averted.

On deck Dorn encountered Leonard Binturn, and together they adjourned to wicker chairs on the observation deck, abaft the lookout. Binturn was not aware that Dorn had looked him over in the past. He was a stout, wheezy man nearing sixty, with apoplectic purple patches on his cheeks. His mustache was clipped close over a tight mouth, and he had bright little eyes like a seal's.

For some time Binturn appeared content to stare out over the rippling waters of Lake Michigan. When finally the silence was broken, both men studiously avoided mention of business. Dorn knew that Binturn was the less assertive partner in a rival mail order concern. Tufts maintained a friendly rivalry with Binturn & Gearing, who did not conduct the slashing trade campaign that marked the operations of the Barnes-Oldhind crowd. The Binturn & Gearing concern, as it were, was a smaller, neutral buffer state strategically situated between the two battling and hostile mail order powers.

Dorn and Binturn discussed the probable outcome of the World Series, some matters of golf, the eccentricities of their cars, and prohibition. This last subject Binturn mentioned hopefully. Dorn ignored it, knowing that Tufts maintained a dry locker.

"There's a dinghy—a small boat off our port bow, with a man signaling for help," reported Captain Larsen, coming to Dorn when they were a couple of hours out. "Shall I go to his aid?"

"Certainly," ordered Dorn, rising.

With interest he and Binturn stared through the dusk at the waving figure in a rowboat ahead. When the *What Cheer* approached, the man in the open boat shouted excitedly that he was sinking. In proof of this, his boat foundered just as the yacht's tender took him off.

Presently he was on deck, his feet and ankles dripping. He proved to be a rather hard-faced young fellow with a mop of sandy hair falling over his eyes. He wore a sweater, with well tailored trousers.

"Herron's me name, gents—Jack Heron, and much obliged for saving me," announced the newcomer, addressing Dorn, Binturn, and Captain Larsen, who stood about him on deck. "I was out fishing,

and lost me oars. Then I drifted out farther, and sprung a leak."

"You don't look like a fisherman," criticized the captain.

"I ain't one, or I wouldn't 'a' got in this jam," admitted Herron. "I work in a filling station on Sheridan Drive. Never again!"

"Take him where he can dry out, and give him some dry socks, if you can spare them," commanded Dorn. "I don't see how we can stop to put you ashore, Herron. We're going to—up the lake."

"I'll lend him car fare back from Mackinac, if he needs money," offered Binturn.

Dorn could have kicked the stout man's shins for divulging their destination.

Captain Larsen returned and called Dorn aside. In an undertone, he declared:

"That fellow was never out fishing, Mr. Tufts. Look at his skin. He'd have been sunburned if he'd ever been fishing long enough to get out this far. He'd have been picked up sooner, too."

"I'm inclined to agree with you, captain," replied Dorn; "but we can't throw him overboard because of that."

For the second time that day he had encountered a man who had represented himself as something he palpably was not. Dorn frowned over the problem as he rejoined Binturn. They dined, and continued their noncommittal chat. Binturn declared for bed comparatively early, and Dorn followed suit; but only sleeplessness rewarded his obedience to the adage which promises health, wealth, and wisdom to those who retire betimes.

Tossing in his comfortable bed, he reviewed the puzzling events of the day. Why had Tufts ordered him off on this blind cruise? Why had the soft-handed man who said he was a farmer visited the Tufts building? What was the truth about this castaway whom they had picked up in mid lake? What was Tufts doing this night?

From curiosity, Dorn turned to introspection. These mystifying events concentrated his thoughts on the fact that he had been ordered away on a mission the nature of which was not revealed to him. He was just a hireling, to be ordered around for some presumably important reason, but not trusted enough to be told what it was all about; and yet he had obeyed his employer unquestioningly.

Dissatisfaction enveloped him. He was

drifting—drifting as surely as the man they had picked up. He did not know his port, he was not allowed to chart his own course. The fact that he was well paid did not soften the fact that he was doing nothing to make a name in the world. He was paid to discard his own personality and ape another man, to pose as another for purposes of deceiving.

He could not go through life forever as Tufts's double. It was not a position that held a future. Some day Tufts would die or retire, and where would he be then? The best years of his life would have been given to effacing Philip Dorn, and to acting a lie.

There must be an end to this, he told himself. At the end of this year, or the next, he must take a stand. He must reassert himself. His own profession had closed to him. Possibly in the movies—

A shadow passed his stateroom porthole. He rose softly and slipped in bare feet to the door, which he opened a crack. Only the few men of the watch were up, absorbed in their duties.

Dorn peered cautiously into the adjoining stateroom, which Binturn occupied. Within a beam of light whipped around—a flash light. The light disappeared. Dorn backed into his room as the other door opened enough to let a dark figure slip out.

Curious, Dorn crept soundlessly after the retreating shadow as it disappeared behind the deck house. Hugging the wall was the dark bulk, pointing the flash light over the starboard rail. His torch flashed on and off in a crude code. Dorn knew this, for, although the flashes were aimed in the opposite direction, he saw them reflected from the polished brass rail along the yacht's side.

Astern, to starboard, was a dark shape with all but cruising lights doused. Its muffled putt-putting betrayed it as a power boat throttled down. On board of it another flash light winked back in code.

Dorn was gathering himself to leap at the mysterious signaler when he was struck from behind by the smashing impact of a heavy body. Groping hands seized his throat, and a triumphant voice shouted:

"Got you!"

VII

At the first sound of the thump, scuffle, and outcry, the shadowy signaler darted to the stern rail, waving his flash in frantic arcs. Dorn raised his severely bumped

head in time to see the prowler step over the rail and jump from the stern of the rushing yacht. Even after he had struck the water and submerged, the fellow clung to his flash light. Dorn could see it bobbing and sinking far astern, while the power boat put on speed and dashed to the rescue.

Turning and struggling, Dorn was about to wrench loose and give battle to his assailant, when he recognized the bray as Binturn's voice.

"Binturn, let go!" he cried. "You've got the wrong man. You're letting that fellow escape!"

Binturn was as slow and heavy of mind as he was of body. Reluctantly he released his hold and relinquished his victory. There was suspicion in his voice as he released Dorn, demanding:

"What you doing out here? I waked up to see somebody sneaking out of my room."

"That's the fellow who just jumped overboard," cried Dorn, aggravated at the untimely interference. "I looked out and saw him slipping out of your door."

"Well, I came out and found you hiding here," grumbled Binturn. "How did you get here, and why didn't you grab him when you had the chance?"

"I followed him to see what he was up to," replied Dorn. "You jumped me just as I was going to spring on him. We're wasting time while he gets away. That power boat was following, and it's picking him up. They'll escape yet!"

This appeared quite probable, as the power boat was already scooting toward the eastern horizon.

Dorn tore loose from Binturn and ran to the man at the wheel. Addressing him, Phil ordered:

"Turn to the east, and pursue that power boat!"

"I have my course. That might be dangerous," protested the man, looking in the direction indicated. "Please call the captain, Mr. Tufts. I can't change the course without his orders, sir."

Captain Larsen was already bustling out, pulling on some clothes. When the situation was hastily explained, he shook his head dubiously.

"They're heading for the Michigan shore, and there are islands where they can dodge," he stated. "With their speed, they can outdistance us on a short dash; and it

will be a blind search in the dark, if they're trying to lose us—which they are. We haven't much chance of catching them; but if you say so, Mr. Tufts—"

"Never mind, then," sighed Dorn. "Keep on the original course. Turn out every one on board, and we'll see who's missing—although there's little doubt who it is."

"That fellow we picked up, of course," snapped Larsen.

A hasty counting of noses confirmed this foregone conclusion. Herron was the only person missing.

"Now that's a nice way to repay my offering to stake him to car fare back, the dirty crook!" grumbled Binturn, waddling about in his pyjamas.

He made a rather comical figure, but the chill night air reminded Dorn that he himself was similarly attired.

"Suppose you look through your things and see if he took anything," suggested Philip. "He was prowling around in your room when I got on his trail."

Binturn retired to his room and made a hasty search.

"That's mighty funny," he reported, emerging. "My money and valuables are all here. Maybe he was scared off before he could take them; unless—h-m!"

"I wonder if the fellow could have been after something else," remarked Dorn thoughtfully.

His lips closed over further speculation. Could this have anything to do with some business deal of Tufts's?

Captain Larsen again led his supposed employer aside.

"If you'll excuse my saying it, Mr. Tufts," he began, "I think that fellow was a pirate who thought a rich man like you would carry a lot of money around with him. The power boat you speak of must have been the one that passed us this evening, just before we sighted that fellow in the rowboat."

"They planted him there for us, all right," agreed Dorn. "Probably they put him overside in the power boat's tender, after making sure they were across our course. He probably shot the hole in the boat that made it fill when he saw us bearing down toward him. Good riddance! I don't think we'll have any more trouble to-night. It was pretty much like taking a shot in the dark, the way he lay in wait for us, wasn't it?"

"The What Cheer is pretty well known on the lakes as your yacht, Mr. Tufts," reminded Captain Larsen. "Sure you didn't lose anything?"

Thus reminded, Dorn thought of the roll of bills that Tufts had intrusted to him, and hurried to search his own clothes. He was relieved and puzzled to find his money untouched.

Larsen put a sailor on guard outside the rooms occupied by the owner and his guest. In spite of the blow on his head, the exciting midnight adventure seemed to have soothed Dorn's mind. He fell asleep, and slumbered late.

They raised Mackinac Island, at the crossroads of the Great Lakes, at noon the next day. Binturn elected to go ashore for luncheon, expressing a desire to have solid earth underfoot for the rest of the day. He invited the supposed Tufts to accompany him, and Dorn accepted, feeling that his employer wished him to maintain contact with Binturn constantly.

Having gorged heavily, the stout man sank with a grunt into a comfortable chair on the wide veranda of the big white hotel looking out on the roadstead. He was content to sit there and smoke the rest of the afternoon, being fatigued by the excitement and exertion of the night's encounter. Dorn preferred to keep on his feet after the meal, to stave off the possibility of accumulating fat.

After viewing the links, he strolled over and gazed longingly at the tennis courts, where some lively matches were in progress. Tennis was a game which he enjoyed as Dorn, but which was not suited to the rôle of Tufts.

On one court the playing of an agile, graceful girl attracted his attention. She was a lithe, active young woman of about twenty-five, whose charming countenance, with its regular features, seemed unaffected by the sun and the exertions of her strenuous game. A white Helen Wills eyeshade piquantly set off her dark brown hair, while white knickers gave her long, graceful legs full play.

Dorn found himself gazing at her in fascination as she concluded her game with a smashing ace, defeating a lively young fellow who was opposing her. As she strolled off the court, swinging her racket, her eyes met Dorn's eager gaze. To his chagrin, she walked straight toward him, her unfaltering gaze on him. Then, making his

heart flop alarmingly, she smiled dazzlingly and demanded:

"Don't you remember me, Mr. Tufts?"

VIII

PANDEMONIUM broke loose in Stagger Inn at the moment when Ramsey Tufts was seized by one of the agents of the Anti-Crime Organization, who were egging on the regular policemen. Manager and waiters were battling with the unofficial investigators, who had tried to seize drinks at the moment when one of their number brought in the officers. This resistance was designed to give the customers time to dispose of any incriminating liquor.

"You got a nerve to grab my pal!" yelled Morgan, clubbing a mineral water bottle down on the head of the man holding Tufts.

The raider dropped heavily on the table, which capsized with a crash of glass. Two other investigators and a uniformed officer dashed toward the fallen man's assailant. Somebody turned out the lights.

"This way, Phil!" shouted Tracy, tugging at Tufts's sleeve.

The dancer herded the bewildered mag-nate and the two women toward a window. Kit had come to life at the first yell, and she led the way in jumping from the window to the ground. Morgan stood guard until Tufts had followed Loraine safely to the lawn. Then the little hooper hurried them toward the parked motors, excitedly demanding:

"Which is our car?"

"See here!" began the mail order king, but Morgan thrust him unceremoniously into the driver's seat, beside Loraine, who had jumped to the wheel of Dorn's car.

Tracy practically threw Kit into the rear seat, and then he stood in the driveway while the car was backed out of line. Tufts's heart sank as a husky man ran after them, crying:

"Hold on there, you! We want names—witnesses!"

He was almost upon them when Morgan, without warning, performed a common vaudeville dancing evolution. Throwing himself forward on the palms of his hands, he turned a lightning cartwheel. His shoe soles landed heavily on the man's midships, knocking the pursuer flat.

"So's your old man!" reminded Morgan, springing to the running board as Dorn's car dashed into the night.

Loraine let it out as soon as they had cleared the lights around the inn. There were sounds of pursuit behind, and she sent the car speeding along the dark country highway. This was totally unfamiliar territory to Tufts, who remained silent, in spite of his uncomfortable conviction that they were dashing northward.

"Hey, Phil, give me the oil can!" requested Morgan, leaning forward and tapping him on the shoulder. "Give me the hooch, before it gets you into any more trouble!"

Registering repugnance, Tufts passed back Morgan's flask. He was glad that Loraine had not trifled with the stuff, for she was pushing the speed indicator past fifty. Ordinarily this would have caused Tufts to protest loudly, but just then it seemed in keeping with the other events of the night. To his surprise, he had no feeling of alarm. He was getting into the spirit of the adventure.

Presently, however, he ventured a mild opinion that they were traveling in the wrong direction.

"Oh, be yourself!" advised Loraine. "The night's young. I know my way. I'm taking a roundabout course to dodge pursuit."

Tufts subsided, wondering how a roundabout route could lead persistently in one direction. The sky was overcast, and he had no moon or stars to give him a clew to the course they were taking. An hour of furious driving took them through farming country, darkened, unfamiliar villages, flat land, and clumps of inky black trees. Then the car slackened, and finally it stopped on a stretch of road in sight of a farmhouse.

"Out of gas," announced Loraine, following an examination. She made this uncomfortable fact public in a calm tone, and added: "You ought to have filled your tank, Phil."

"For crying out loud!" commented Kit sleepily, just as Tufts was about to say that he always left such matters to his chauffeur.

"I guess you'll have to walk to that farmhouse and ask," sighed Loraine. "I'm sure I saw a light. Maybe they'll have some."

"Why should I?" Tufts demanded querulously. He did not relish that quarter-mile walk in the dark. "Let our hoof-er do it. He's younger."

"Who? Me?" asked Morgan. "Where'd you get that younger stuff? 'Raine said you just looked older. I may be a hooper, but I don't throw my dogs when I got a bean. We ride there. Wait a minute!"

Clambering out, he stepped behind the car. Returning, he ordered Loraine to try the engine. Following an uncertain hesitation, life throbbed feebly in the motor, sufficient to propel the car along toward the farmhouse.

"How did you do it?" inquired Loraine.

"I poured most of the hooch into the tank," explained Morgan. "Nearly broke my heart, but it beats walking."

When this expensive fuel sufficed to carry them to the gate outside the farmhouse, Loraine ordered the supposed Phil to go to the door and ask for gas. She honked the horn loudly as Tufts timidly approached the door. An electric light flashed on over the portal.

"Gee, I thought apple knockers used candles!" exclaimed Tracy Morgan.

A cross, suspicious man opened the door a crack.

"What's the idea, waking us at this hour?" he began belligerently. Abruptly he checked his tirade, peered unbelievably at the face under the light, and then, in a tone of incredulous apology, he blurted: "Why, if it isn't Mr. Tu—"

"S-s-sh!" implored Tufts, in agonized appeal, taking a step forward to silence the recognizing cry.

"Come right in," invited the farmer, swinging open the door and revealing himself in a nightshirt draped over his trousers. Tufts bolted in and shut the door. "Don't you remember me, Mr. Tufts? I visited your plant two years back—Herman Bucholtz, remember? Think of seeing you here!"

"Herman, I'm going to ask a favor," said the magnate, giving the handclasp that had built up his business. "I'm going to ask you to keep this a secret. A young man I trusted in my organization fell into the hands of a woman. I learned of it, and went out to save him and suppress the affair. They don't know who I am, and I want you to keep quiet about this. I'm taking him back to the city for another chance. We ran out of gas. Could you supply some?"

"Sure, Mr. Tufts," promised the farmer. "You're lucky I was just turning in after putting away the flivver. Ma's in bed."

Her and I just drove back from seeing a picture and having some chop suey over to Milwaukee. Look at the dining room set, the lights, the pictures on the wall—all Tufts. I'll get you the gas right away."

"And don't mention my name," admonished Tufts.

A pleasant glow was battling with his anxiety. His personality had won this man.

"You must have hypnotized him," commented Loraine. "I told you folks Phil was a live one when he began hitting on all six!"

"Where are we?" asked Tracy, when the countryman had refueled their tank.

Bucholtz stared.

"Don't you know? Why, you're about fifteen miles west of Milwaukee," he informed. "Good night, Mr.—er— See you next time!"

"In Wisconsin, eh?" commented Loraine, as she drove off. "Phil, it's lucky you aren't some rich old millionaire."

"Why is it lucky?" inquired the magnate apprehensively.

"Be yourself!" she chided. "If you were, wouldn't you be a mark for a scheming girl you'd spirited from one State to another?"

A shiver ran down Ramsey Tufts's spine. He *was* a rich old millionaire, and therefore a mark. He forced a laugh.

"But you spirited me," he corrected, trying to carry off lightly a situation which seemed loaded with the alternatives of prosecution or blackmail.

"I suppose that if we cross the line back into Illinois, it makes a second case," mused Loraine. "Oh, dear, what shall we do? Better keep in this State until we can think it over."

"Aw, step on the gas and get somewhere," urged Morgan.

Loraine stepped. The car burned up the road at a rate which startled the young-man-for-a-night. As they flashed through a village, where lights shone from only one building, the engine was roaring and the wind whipping furiously in his face. A glance at the speed indicator caused Tufts to shout remonstrances in Loraine's ear, and then to force her foot from the accelerator. At his sharp order, she relinquished the wheel.

They had just changed places when a motor cycle shot alongside and a uniformed arm reached in to grasp Tufts's wrist.

"Come along!" said the man in blue. "Turn around!"

"A hick cop!" exclaimed Morgan, seizing the policeman's arm and trying to push it from the car, while Kit beat at the man's hand.

"For that, you're all arrested," announced the speed cop, whipping out a service pistol. "Back to the lockup!"

Ten minutes later the mail order king and his unwonted male companion were booked at the village lockup. The two women were allowed to sit in the room where the desk sergeant presided at the telephone. Ramsey Tufts, millionaire and reformer, was thrust into the lockup's only cell.

IX

FORTUNATELY for the respectable Mr. Tufts, he had not transferred any of his personal belongings to Dorn's suit when he donned it. At that time he had not expected to leave Phil's apartment. When Loraine Cuyler lured him out, he had stopped only long enough to take money and a watch. Dorn, conscientiously guarding details of his dual rôle, had always barred identifying marks from his garments and personal possessions.

"Call yourself Dorpf," whispered Morgan, as they were herded into the police station.

Tracy announced himself as "Morgens-tern," and addressed an easy, ingratiating "*Wie geht's?*" to the sergeant. The latter replied coldly that American was spoken there, already.

When the two men were shoved into the general cell for overnight guests, a shadowy form huddled in one corner moved slightly and emitted a groan. Tufts's overtaxed nerves tautened, and he shrank involuntarily. Tracy Morgan, pushing from behind, reassured him:

"It's only a souse sleeping off his still. Don't you get the bouquet? Maybe you expected a private *suite de luxe*."

"Vot time iss?" quavered the man in the corner.

"What difference does it make? You aren't goin' anywhere," rejoined Morgan. "It's 4 G.M."

"Four? *Am morgen?*" cried the man, now dimly visible by the corridor light. He buried his face in his hands, moaning: "*Ach, vot vill mine Gloria, mine Pola, mine Bébé, und mine Colleen do yet?*"

"Listen, brother," commanded Tracy, staring at the disheveled man in overalls. "Have you been entertaining the motion picture industry? To whom do you refer—all them faintly familiar names?"

"Mine cows," explained the prisoner. "Pansy gives them such names yet. Comes milking time now, und I ain't it!"

"Came the dawn," corrected Morgan.

In his distant youth Ramsey Tufts had been a farmer boy. Sympathy for this be-draggled agriculturist stirred him.

"You don't seem so worried about Pansy," Tracy said.

"Worried from her yet," corrected the man. "Off her will I catch hell ven I *heim gehe*. She sent me on the village here to get a money order off the post office, from the money she saved off the butter and eggs—"

"Aha, I suspected you was a big butter and egg man!" accused Morgan. "You spent the dough stepping out. Young man, let this be a warning to you to shun wine, women, and song. So you gave her the fifty thousand dollars?"

Loud disclaimers from the other prisoner greeted this accusation. The sum was only twelve dollars and thirty-five cents. On the way to the post office he had encountered two cronies, who had treated to two rounds of *schnapps*. Feeling under social obligations, he had bought another round. From that point his memory grew hazy. There were more rounds, some matching for dollars, complete evaporation of the sum intrusted to him, and a fight which landed him outdoors. Then he had fought with the cop who tried to send him home, and had landed in a cell. There he had slept until the newcomers joined him. Remorse gnawed his mind.

"You're lucky to be able to put on such a big party for only twelve thirty-five," commented Morgan.

"But it was Pansy's, for a swell *kaffee-klatzsch* set off Ramsey Tufts," protested the man, in a tone which meant that that explained everything. "She wanted she should have like all the other neighbor women got, a *kaffee-klatzsch* set off Ramsey Tufts."

"That's the hicks' mail order concern, huh?" asked Morgan. "You say it like there wasn't any other."

"Everybody here buys everything off Ramsey Tufts by mail," stated the farmer simply. Tufts's heart warmed to this loyal

soul. "Wait, I should show you. *Ach*, if I loosed dot catalogue, I don't dare went home! Sergeant, can I at the Ramsey Tufts catalogue look once, or did I loose it maybe?"

"You hung on to it through everything," grinned the sergeant, coming in response to the anxious call. He handed over the thick volume he carried. "I was reading it. Think I'll get that No. 1141. Some value, that. What was you doing with it, Gus?"

"Pansy made me took it *mit*, so Henry Schmalz, the insurance man, could copy off it the order right on the typewriter," explained Gus. "Look, fellers—here is!"

Eagerly he held it to the feeble light.

"This is a sketch!" barked Morgan. "Listen—'This elegant and dainty set—' Ain't that the cat's?"

"What's funny about that?" snapped Tufts, restraining a desire to shout that it was a correct description.

"You act as sore as if you was this old whiskers himself," scoffed Tracy. "'Elegant and dainty'! So's your old man!"

"Sergeant, Gus here ought to get home now to milk his cows," spoke up Tufts, turning his back angrily on the companion of his revels. "Could I go his bail until he 'tends to it?"

"Sure, if you want me to peel fifty off that roll I took off you," replied the sergeant. "I was wondering why you didn't offer cash bail for yourself."

"I'm not accustomed to being arrested," enlightened Mr. Tufts, so simply that the others laughed.

Gus—his name was Gus Landsmann, of R. F. D. 3, he insisted on informing his liberator—hurried away after profuse thanks and a promise to return for arraignment. Tufts ignored the suggestion to post cash bail for his party. It involved too much recording. He preferred waiting a few hours longer, paying a fine, and getting away. Moreover, the lockup was the only place open at that hour, and he urgently craved immediate rest. With a shudder, the master of millions stretched himself out on one hard cot, his head pillowed on the Tufts catalogue.

Before court opened at nine o'clock, Tufts and Morgan had been allowed to send out for a good breakfast, a barber, and collars. As the genial sergeant let them out, he suggested:

"Better leave that catalogue with me. Might not go easy if Justice Hamburg saw

it. He used to have a little store, but he run it so bum that it failed; so he blamed it on the big mail order houses crushing the little stores. Campaigned on it as the poor man's candidate, and got to the Legislature once. Then he got elected a J. P. He said he'd like to get one of them fellows up before him—particularly this Tufts. Tell Gus I'll keep it till he gets out."

Ramsey Tufts was in a nightmare trance when he was led before the justice of the peace in the front room of the latter's drab cottage. Justice Hamburg, a lean-faced man past middle age, ceased pulling his ragged red mustache and stared in a startled manner as the accused speeder was arraigned. He rose from his official desk, ignoring the policeman's statement that the car license was recorded in the name of Philip Dorn.

Almost choking with excitement, the justice ordered the defendant to step into the adjoining dining room. Closing the door, he exclaimed in a queer voice:

"Well, Mr. Tufts?"

X

BESIDE the tennis courts at Mackinac, relief surged over Philip Dorn at sight of the bewitching smile which lighted the girl's face as she addressed him as "Tufts" and asked if he did not remember her. When she had marched toward him so determinedly, he feared that she had mistaken him for an ogler, and was going to denounce him or call for help. Instead, she had approached with the most engaging demonstration of welcome.

"Oh, how are you?" evaded Phil, taking the small, firm, warm hand that was extended. What he wanted to say was: "No! Who are you? I don't know, but I'm desperately anxious to learn."

Inwardly he was berating Tufts for permitting this masquerade to go beyond the limits of the offices. It was safe enough, with the stage all set, to maintain an illusion for visitors in a five-minute period; but when the pretense was carried outside that setting, they ran the risk he had now encountered—the risk of meeting one of Tufts's social acquaintances. And this charming one, of all persons!

"You don't remember me," she accused, with feigned anguish and reproach in her voice. "And to think that all these years I have cherished the memory of the moment when you clasped me in your arms!"

Amazement and fierce, unreasoning jealousy contracted Dorn's brows and tugged at his heart when he heard this. So this was what that sly old hypocrite, Ramsey Tufts, did! He went around hugging beautiful girls—and this particular girl, at that! The shameless old fraud who had assured Philip that there were no women in his life, when he insisted that there should be none in his double's.

"I'm Ann Pirie," she prompted hopefully, withdrawing her hand, which he had forgotten to relinquish. "I'm a niece of Foster Kimball."

"Oh!" exclaimed Philip, contriving a smile intended to signify that the incident was coming back to him slowly.

"Don't pretend! You just don't remember," she accused. "Probably you've held so many girls since then that a single instance doesn't leave any—"

"Not one, I assure you," protested Phil. "When—"

"It was more than fifteen years ago," laughed the girl. Dorn laughed with her now. "I wasn't quite ten. Remember? Oh, disillusionment—you don't! It's as plain in my memory as if it were last week. Uncle was sick. You called at the house. I was visiting there that day. Their green maid left you standing in the hall. The house had a lovely banister rail, down which I slid. I popped off the end, bang—against you, and you clasped me in your arms!"

She brought this last out with mock impressiveness. Phil sighed reminiscently, and asked:

"Do you happen to know if there are any good stair rails here?"

"You *have* changed!" she cried. "You were more embarrassed than I, that day. When they told me, after you had gone, that I had nearly bowled over Ramsey Tufts, I could see that I was supposed to be terribly impressed; but I wasn't. I just thought of you as a rather nice man. You look precisely as I remember you—not a day older. I've been on the lookout for you to-day ever since somebody identified your yacht when it came in. Then I heard you had lunched here."

They were walking back together toward the hotel, she talking eagerly, he listening quite as eagerly, to patch out his information concerning her. Somehow it seemed quite natural. Somehow they both forgot that he was supposed to be more than twice

her age. The young fellow of the tennis match had been left behind, forgotten.

Some acquaintances move at a snail's pace, some at the speed of a racing plane. By the time they had reached the hotel steps, Phil and Ann were on the friendliest terms. She was staying there with a Mrs. Clayton, who was continuously engaged in bridge, and who had modern views about letting girls go their own gait. Ann inclined to sports. She was about to dress for golf. Did Tufts golf? He did, and would be pleased to join her.

They parted. Phil hurried out to the yacht, donned one of Tufts's sedate golf costumes, packed a bag with a change, and took it ashore, together with his employer's sticks. They completed the course by dusk, contesting every hole fiercely, and were old friends when they left the last green.

When they returned to the hotel, Phil looked around for Binturn. Just as he caught sight of his cruising guest on the veranda, another man, who had been talking to Binturn, walked away. Phil had only a fleeting glimpse, but he was certain that the fellow was the soft-handed fake farmer who had visited the Tufts offices, and later had followed him to the yacht club landing on the preceding day.

Dorn hurried to join Binturn, hoping to get some light. His guest said nothing about the strange man, and Phil decided not to ask.

After dinner that night Phil found himself strolling out with Ann Pirie. Mrs. Clayton was immersed in bridge, and the girl had been left to herself. There was a dance at the hotel, but she evaded the hopeful invitations of several dashing young men, and had no difficulty in encountering Dorn. His invitation to stroll was accepted without urging, and with no word to suggest that dancing was too strenuous for him.

A moon was shining that night, making a romantic setting for a stroll. They walked up to the historic blockhouse, a relic of 1812. The old sally port, with its roughly plastered arch, seemed an ideal place for lovers. The moon cast inky shadows there, while there were brilliant ripples on the water, where the lights of small craft twinkled. Odd-shaped ore carriers and grain boats slipped by in the dusk, from Lake Superior, bound for Chicago, Cleveland, or Buffalo. Staring out on this modern activity, and recalling the fact that

here, a few centuries back, had been a wilderness where Indians lurked, stood the statue of Père Marquette.

"What a man he must have been!" breathed Ann, looking up at the dark figure standing erect on its tall pedestal, straight as an arrow, in spite of the enveloping priestly robes. "He had the courage to strike out into the wilderness and beat his own trail. He could have lived softly and safely, and nobody would ever have known his name; but he dared, he took a chance, and he lives in history. That's the kind of man I admire—one who dares to be himself and do something to make a name, rather than living in ignoble comfort. Marquette was a pioneer, just as you are in your field. There's a catch phrase that has been popular, and it's so good that it oughtn't to be allowed to become cheapened—'Be yourself!'"

Philip Dorn was suffocating with bitterness, which silenced and stifled the endearments that he had been nerving himself to utter. Blindly he rose and started away, with Ann accompanying him, perplexed and almost ignored.

A fury of resolve was rising within him. He was not himself, but he was going to be himself as quickly as he could effect his release from the coils of this deception which was the price of his living softly and safely. He did not want to live softly and safely.

Answering his silent challenge to fate, there came a swift and almost soundless rush from behind. Two pairs of muscular hands seized him, choked him, and dragged him from the shaded path.

XI

WHILE that instant of surprise was upon him, his two assailants rushed Dorn into the shadows under a low-hanging, heavy-branched tree. Wrenching himself loose from one thug, he turned like a wounded tiger upon the other. Instantly the man whom he had flung off whipped out a pistol, which he jabbed viciously at Phil.

"Stick 'em up!" he snarled. "Up before I bore you!"

His weapon was prodding Dorn's side. To resist was suicidal, but Dorn was in a mood to take a chance. His hands were raised reluctantly, brushing a leaf. The thug with the gun moved around until he faced Dorn squarely, with his pistol an inch from Phil's chest. The other fellow, who

had not released his hold, pressed against Dorn's back, holding his left hand gripped about the victim's throat, while his right hand searched Phil's pockets.

"Make a move, and I'll send a bullet through you!" promised the gunman tensely.

"If you do, it will go through your pal, too," reminded Dorn.

Involuntarily the searcher let go and stepped away, while the gunman backed a pace. At the same moment Dorn leaped straight up, grasped the thick bough just above his upraised hands, and in the identical movement swung forward in a furious double kick. His toes caught the gunman on pistol hand and stomach, sending him doubled up in a heap.

Promptly Phil swung backward, kicking blindly, and landing a chance kick on the second man, who was rushing him. Then he sprang at the gunman, who was clawing in the grass for his weapon.

This fellow darted off into the shadows cast by the clump of trees, and vanished. His accomplice disappeared in the opposite direction, when Dorn turned on him. Phil started to plunge after him, but hesitated when he saw Ann. He could not desert her there.

She had started toward the struggling trio, pausing, alert and spellbound, while Dorn repulsed the pair of footpads. She stared at him as he stood there, disheveled, his glasses broken and gone—a fighter. Then she came toward him, admiration shining in her eyes, and cried:

"You were splendid! I was afraid a man of your age—"

"I am not of my age!" Dorn interrupted harshly, unreasonably. Hot words of explanation trembled on his lips, but he resolutely curbed them, and went on: "You have mentioned swimming each day before breakfast. I will join you to-morrow morning."

They walked away in silence, and parted with only a formal "good night." Dorn was burning with resentment—and with love. To-morrow he would show Ann that he was not "a man of your age"—even though his contract forbade him telling her the truth.

Before breakfast the following morning they met at the diving board. In her snugly fitting swimming suit, Ann's lithe, graceful figure was even more alluring than before. She could scarcely veil her surprise

as she noted Phil's firm, muscular arms and legs, freed from the severely conservative garments of Tufts's wardrobe. This was not the figure of a middle-aged man; nor was there any lack of youthful virility in his take-off from the board, after she had risen from a soundless dive. However, even for athletes, a brief time in that icy, crystal water was enough. The instant reaction set hearts to pounding.

That day was devoted to refuting silently the suggestion that he had passed out of young manhood. Phil walked clear around the island's rim before luncheon, with Ann, and beat her at two strenuous sets of tennis in the afternoon. Then he took her out to the What Cheer for tea on board, while the yacht slowly circled the island.

Shining waters, beauty on all sides, blue skies with cottony clouds! Dorn determined to tell her that night—to tell her everything. Yes, night would be the best time, when the moon was casting its spell, and when there would be pleasant, romantic privacy.

Binturn had accompanied him back to the What Cheer, silent and reflective. Although he had not intruded on Dorn's interludes with Ann, he was constantly in sight about the deck.

Phil asked Ann to dine with them on the yacht, promising to take her ashore safely at a reasonable hour. Observing ancient proprieties, he offered to include Mrs. Clayton, although Ann assured him that her nominal companion could not be lured from bridge at night. Ann accepted the invitation with shy happiness, and Dorn expressed pleasure, saying that there was something he wished to tell her that evening. His manner left little doubt as to what he had in mind, nor did Ann seek to evade.

Dorn went ashore in the tender, and sent it back with flowers and special dainties purchased for the dinner. The sailor was ordered to return with the tender at half past seven, to take his supposed employer out to the What Cheer in time for eight o'clock dinner.

Alone at last, Phil hurried to the telegraph bureau, looking for any disguised message from Tufts. Upon his arrival, the preceding day, he had reported by wire to his employer's attorney, Burdick, giving the yacht's location, as he had been instructed to do. There was no message for

him, so Dorn went off in search of Mrs. Clayton.

She proved difficult to locate. All that Phil could learn was that she had gone to an afternoon bridge in some residence, and would return for dinner. He waited, and she slipped by unobserved, coming down only when she had dressed for dinner.

Mrs. Clayton proved to be a large, jolly woman who had no desire to desert bridge for dinner on a yacht, and who scoffed merrily at the idea that a chaperon was needed in modern times. Probably she suspected that she would be "a crowd." Moreover, she may have had matchmaking designs on the wealthy Mr. Tufts favorable to Ann Pirie, although the latter was herself of a well-to-do family.

Hurrying back to shore, alone and on foot, Dorn went out on the pier in general use—a pier flanked by coal heaps and waterside shops. Dusk was settling down, although it was still light enough for a plain view of the roadstead when he reached the end of the pier.

He stared unbelievably. No tender awaited him, and the yacht was leaving. Already the *What Cheer* had put distance between herself and her recent anchorage, and was speeding away on the return route, toward Chicago—carrying off Ann Pirie.

Determined to pursue and overtake the yacht, Phil scanned the few small boats that were passing. These either were too slow, or were inward bound, and they paid no attention when he waved commandingly at the most promising-looking.

Then a power boat swished rapidly from behind the shelter of the coal sheds and passed near the end of the pier, outward bound and invitingly close. There was something familiar about it, but all power boats look much alike, and Dorn was concentrating his attention on the retreating yacht. Immediate response rewarded his hail to the power boat, aboard which there was visible only one man—a pilot in goggles, who inquired:

"Want to go out to some yacht?"

"Overtake that yacht putting out away over there!" ordered Phil, jumping on board, and pointing at the rapidly escaping *What Cheer*.

With a rush of flying spray the power boat dashed away, and swiftly cleared the ring of small craft anchored in the roadstead. Dorn crouched between the goggled pilot and the closed door of the tiny cabin.

He thrilled to the rush of the whipping winds as they pursued the yacht. The roaring of the engine drowned lesser sounds, such as the opening of a cabin door, a step—

A stunning blow crashed down on Phil's head. Darkness engulfed his consciousness. He was out.

XII

WHEN Ramsey Tufts was climbing to the pinnacle of success, he displayed qualities of quick thinking and hard fighting. These had been less in demand after he began riding the crest, but he retained them still. They had been slow in asserting themselves throughout his night of adventure, but they began rallying now. One look past the head of Justice Hamburg had steadied the mail order king to his usual self.

"The name is Dorn," he corrected calmly, flinching from an outright falsehood.

"Yes, Mr. Tufts, I know—also it was Dorpf," reminded the rural J. P., with an odd expression. "Maybe you've heard of me—how I lost my store, and put the blame on you mail order fellows."

"I have heard of you, Judge Hamburg," conceded Tufts, with a shade of reverence in his voice.

"Also you met me," reminded the justice of the peace. "Don't you remember, Mr. Tufts—at your office, last January?"

"Certainly, now that you recall it, I do remember your pleasant visit," beamed Tufts. "So many friends call!"

He could see that Dorn had made his usual good impression on Hamburg.

"Honest, Mr. Tufts, I don't see how you do it," cried the country magistrate. "I was down to Chicago then, and, thinks I, I'll give this octopus place the once-over. Well, sir, I saw a party of folks like myself go in, and I went along. That was an eye-opener, that tour of your plant. I saw more things I'd like to have. Then you come out and shook hands and called folks by name so neighborly that I changed my views. I see how everybody liked you and praised your stuff, and that you was just a big storekeeper who knew your business."

"I noticed immediately that you must have modified your opinion enough to send for some of our goods," observed Tufts meaningly.

His glance roved to the wall, on which was the etching "Colosseum by Moonlight"

—Tufts catalogue No. 831. He saw the golden oak dining room set, No. 457, with the *kaffeeklatsch* set at twelve dollars and thirty-five cents. Sight of these familiar numbers had restored Tufts's confidence when he entered the dining room.

"Sure! Why not?" demanded the justice. "I'm not telling the world I bought off you, but I do like what others do. Listen—losing my store was the best thing which could happen to me. I wasn't cut out for storekeeping. Failing there put me in public life. Then an insurance company gave me big territory. I'm making more money now than I ever did, and I kind of owe it all to you. Of course, I can't let on to folks here, after all I've said; but—how come you got pinched, Mr. Tufts?"

"Trying to help that young man, a *protégé* of mine," explained Tufts vaguely. "I had just taken the wheel away from him, after protesting against the speed at which he was driving, when the officer overtook us. If you really wish to accommodate me, judge, dispose of this case without publicity. I'll pay the fine, and you keep secret the fact that I was involved. How's that?"

"That 'll satisfy justice," ruled the judge. "I hate to soak—"

"Also there's a poor chap named Gus Landsmann, who's coming up for intoxication," suggested Tufts. "If you'll let me pay his fine, you might dismiss him with a lecture and tell him you paid the fine yourself, so as not to penalize his family for his weakness."

"I'll do that," agreed Hamburg, willing to win a free reputation for generosity on the bench.

Together, judge and defendant returned to the expectant court room. In the shortest possible time Tufts had paid his fine for speeding, and fines for his companions charged with resisting an officer.

"Thought you were fixing the judge when he took you in there," commented Morgan, when they were back in the sedan, starting away.

"You could see that Phil impressed him," reminded Loraine. "That hick judge was fairly apologetic when he fined him."

Tufts silently drove ahead in the direction in which they had been traveling, taking his time about deciding what to do. He had no desire to return through the region in which they had encountered such

hectic adventures. Some of his apprehension about crossing State lines had evaporated with the night. With day returned common sense. Still, he was anxious to part company with his companions as pleasantly as possible. His general idea was to circle around through the back country and drive into Milwaukee from the north.

They had motored silently along country highways for an hour when they heard a distant popping of shots.

"Sounds like the Fourth of July," remarked Tracy Morgan.

"Farmers driving off crows, more likely," corrected Tufts.

They had proceeded for ten minutes longer at the sedate pace that Tufts had set, when bushes parted beside the road a short distance ahead, where a sharp turn forced cars to slow down. A hatless man with a hard mouth, a granite chin, and roving eyes, stepped to the roadside. His clothes were spangled with briars through which he had forced his way. Over his shoulder was strapped a hiker's haversack.

"Give us a lift," he demanded impudently, stepping forward and raising his left hand commandingly.

"No—the car's full," protested Tufts, starting on.

Instantly the fellow sprang upon the running board and thrust into the car his right hand, which held a heavy automatic pistol.

"I've just bumped off one guy. Who's next?" he inquired, swinging his weapon to cover every one in the car. "I'm riding with you, see? Stop this bus. You, cutie, get in the back seat."

"Be yourself!" requested Loraine, to whom this order was addressed.

She spoke tartly, despite the menace; but she crowded into the rear seat with Tracy and Kit. The gunman frisked the two men for weapons, lightly feeling their clothes with a swift, expert touch. He pushed into the driver's seat beside Tufts, and jammed his weapon against the latter's shrinking side, covering the gun with his haversack.

"Head north, and push for the Michigan line, where I got a hide-out," ordered the bandit. "Whenever we pass any one, we're all little pals together, see? If any one tries to tip off anybody we meet, or makes a move, I'll kill Whiskers here and then fix the rest of you. You, back there,

I can watch you in the mirror, so don't try nothing. I told you already I fixed one guy who took a chance with me, so I don't intend to get caught. If you think I'm bluffing, look at this!"

Boastfully he opened the haversack for a moment, long enough for them to see that it was packed with neatly banded packages of money. Any one could connect this with the sounds of firing heard a few minutes earlier. Some country bank had been raided in the quiet hours following its morning opening, and this bandit had escaped after shooting a man.

Terrible hours followed for Ramsey Tufts. Urged on by the bandit, he drove rapidly northward, avoiding passing through towns. The gun muzzle snuggled against his side excused him from any charge of cowardice. The bravest hero would not have had a chance with that murderous rat.

When the car passed other machines, or houses, the bandit sat half turned, chatting with the rear seat passengers, and keeping every one constantly under his sinister surveillance. They lunched on frankfurter sandwiches and pop bought from a boy at an isolated wayside hot dog stand, but nobody had much appetite.

They were rolling silently along when suddenly the bandit turned on Tracy Morgan, as a suspicious move by the latter drew his attention.

Tracy was staring blankly, innocently ahead, and gently, tantalizingly shaking his silver flask. For an hour he had been fishing cautiously in the crack between the wall and the seat cushions, where he had parked the contraband when they were arrested for speeding. Jiggling the flask, he raised it toward his lips.

"Hey, what you got there?" demanded the outlaw.

"Aw, just a shot of Scotch," evaded Tracy. "Not so good."

"Gimme it," commanded the bandit.

"Have a heart," pleaded Morgan, with cunning reluctance. "It's only one good slug, and I need it bad."

"I need it worse," snapped the outlaw, snatching away the flask and taking a deep, hasty gulp. "Hell's bells, what's in it? Here, you, Foxy Grandpa! Take a slug of this, and prove it ain't poisoned!"

Protesting that he did not drink, Tufts took the flask. A prod of the gun overbore his hesitation, and he strangled down

a sip of the fiery liquor. With it went sugarlike grains which tasted bitter. The bandit, sputtering, was glaring suspiciously at him and swaying oddly. Tufts felt drowsy, and his head sagged. Instinctively he shut off his power.

"Damn you!" choked the bandit, staggering up and raising his heavy weapon. His eye was dull. "You've poisoned—"

Sunlight touched the black arc as the automatic swung down waveringly toward Tufts's head. A spurt of fire, a thunderous roar in his ears, and the mail order king pitched face forward into a fathomless sea of blackness.

Twilight and evening bells were in order when his heavy eyes opened again. He was in a bed. Beside it, cozily domestic in an easy chair, alone with him, sat Lorraine Cuyler.

Closing his eyes to shut out the vision, he sighed. Possibly he was seeing things. Never since his boyhood had a woman sat beside his bed. However, thinking it over, the vision had been a rather attractive one. Cautiously he opened his eyes, and met the girl's gaze.

"You're all right? Oh, Phil! What a relief!" sighed Lorraine, with genuine feeling in her voice, and touched his head with cool fingers.

"What happened?" demanded Tufts. "What am I doing here? Oh, that gunman! Where—"

"He hit you just as he fell asleep," Lorraine replied. "You see, Trace tempted him to drink by pretending he wanted it himself; and he had slipped into the flask all those sleeping tablets that he took away from Kit. One was a dose. The bandit became suspicious as he felt the effect, and tried to shoot you, but he passed out just as he pulled the trigger. His aim was bad. I guess he couldn't see straight; but the gun butt pounded your head, and you fell forward. I drove on until I became worried about your not reviving."

"Where are the others?" inquired Tufts.

"After we tied up the bandit, we dumped him into the back of the car," she continued. "He slept like a log. We covered him with the rug, and parked in a secluded place while Trace walked over to a town. There he found out what the shooting was all about—a bank holdup back there where that fellow piled on board. Trace had borrowed a hundred from your

roll, and he bought a used flivver. We loaded the bandit into that, and Trace and Kit took him back to claim the reward. Trace thought it would sound better to say that they encountered the fellow while they were driving along by themselves. He thought you wouldn't want to be involved, and would prefer that to the real story."

"Then we're rid of them!" sighed Tufts, relieved.

"Don't forget that Trace got rid of the bandit," Loraine remonstrated. "They said that after they collected the reward they might follow us to Mackinac."

"Mackinac?" he cried. "What do you know about Mac—"

"You mumbled it several times while you were asleep," she explained. "I decided there was some reason why you wanted to go there, so I drove on up this way. I had to go slowly and carefully. People thought I had a sick man in the car. When I saw sunset approaching, I stopped here. This was such an attractive place, and looked so inviting for a night's rest, that I drove in. Told the folks here that you'd been knocked down and stunned by another car. They're very nice, and so sympathetic about my husband! That's you."

"Wha-at?" wailed Tufts, trying to rise. "We must leave at once!"

"It's all right, Phil," she soothed. "Be yourself! This is no French farce. You're not fit to go on. Drink this milk. Now go to sleep."

Tufts fell back weakly, and slept. His last conscious impression was of her gently kissing his forehead.

Tree top twitterings that heralded the day aroused him. Lying there, he listened to the birds' musical chatter as they discussed breakfast. Darkness was dissolving, and the new beauty of morning thrilled him. For minutes he luxuriated; then, remembering where he was, he rose cautiously. He was alone.

Hastily dressing, he freshened at a modern washstand, enameled, and with running water. A tin basin at the pump had served when he lived on a farm. This room was on the ground floor, across a hall from the living room, where he found Loraine asleep in a chair.

"You looked so fussed about being compromised that I left," she smiled, waking instantly at his touch. "Now that you're up, please clear out for awhile and leave

that room to me. I want to look my best at breakfast."

Sounds of quiet activity led him to the big barn. There he found an alert, pleasant farmer, busily engaged in milking. The mail order king was allowed to prove his boast that he could milk, but not before he had donned a spotless white duster and had observed precautions undreamed of when he was a farm boy. Fascinated by the enameled dairy with its array of shining, clever contrivances, he expressed his surprise.

"Why not?" demanded the farmer. "Easy to be progressive nowadays. Just order from Tufts, and the mail brings 'em to the gate!"

Pleasurable pride filled Tufts. At first hand he was learning how much he meant to the rural millions, how much he had done to make country life more comfortable.

When breakfast was served, Loraine appeared, looking as fresh and attractive as she had when he first saw her. She did the talking for both of them. The farm couple were considerate in restraining their curiosity.

It was late morning when the city couple left. As they drove off, followed by friendly waves, Loraine asked:

"Where away?"

"Does it matter?" smiled the mail order magnate.

Two days and nights of adventuring had wrought a change in him. Haroun-al-Raschid himself, snooping around Bagdad, never got a bigger kick out of his wanderings than had Tufts. Life was something more than piling up money and scoring business triumphs, he had rediscovered. Out here on the broad highroad life was full-flavored, a bit dangerous, with a dash of romance. He was in no hurry to end the episode then and there, when plainly it had not reached its logical conclusion.

"Not at all," rejoined Loraine, and quoted: "'Whither thou goest, I will go.' D'you remember that line? You ought to, having rendered it with great effect. It's from 'Polly of the Circus.'"

"Oh, really now!" he expostulated, staring incredulously at her perfectly serious face. "Surely you know what that's from originally!"

"Be yourself, Phil!" she admonished, provoked. "Certainly I know. Don't act as if I were a dumb-bell. Whatever business you've been in since you quit acting

has made you awfully serious. Can't you loosen up and play on a holiday?"

"I'm going to Mackinac," announced Tufts.

There he could change places with Dorn or put the car on the yacht.

Loraine offered no objection. Over the luncheon she fascinated him by the range of her conversation. It was in marked contrast to her talk with the two "ringers." Chameleonlike, she seemed able to adapt her conversation to her companions.

While he was driving along, in mid afternoon, she fell asleep, leaning against his shoulder. He found the contact rather pleasant. No wonder the girl was tired—she had sat up two nights.

This thought recalled his vague impression that she had kissed him good night. In spite of himself he smiled down on her sleeping face. Without warning, her eyes opened directly into his. Smiling, she patted his arm and snuggled.

"You aren't such a pill as you were the night before last," she commented. "I could almost learn to like you a lot, Phil!"

Shy, pleasant silence fell between them. It still endured when, after five o'clock, they reached the Northern Peninsula village opposite Mackinac Island. Tufts put in a long distance call, and got it through about six. Following twenty minutes of telephoning, he emerged from the booth, looking serious. Without explaining, he drove down to the water.

There was only a small launch available for hire. Promising to return within an hour for Loraine and the car, he put off for Mackinac Island.

As he rounded the end of the island, a thrill went through him. Ahead of him lay his own yacht.

XIII

SPRAY flying from the prow of the leaping power boat revived Philip Dorn. Without giving any intimation of his recovery, he peered through his eyelashes. He was lying on his side, with his hands tied behind him. Two men crouched beside him, behind the pilot, shouting to make themselves heard above the racket.

"To the right!" yelled one man. "Pass that village, and then cruise slow along the shore till we get a signal. I had Joe phone over to Nick to drive along the shore a ways and pick us up, when I saw this bimbo waiting on the pier. Soft for us!"

"And then what?" demanded the other, and Philip recognized Herron's voice.

"We'll drive inland and stick him in an old mine opening I located," replied the other.

Philip knew Herron's companion, too—the soft-handed "farmer" who had spoken to Binturn. He concluded that the trio on the power boat had been watching him when he went out on the pier. The timely offer of a lift to the yacht had been no chance passing. They had rushed out to lure him aboard and overpower him. They were going to take him across to the mainland, the Northern Peninsula, and hide him in a mine shaft. Undoubtedly they had mistaken him for Tufts.

What was it all about? Something sinister. This must have been why Tufts sent him out—to decoy danger away from himself.

"There's a car following along the shore road," cried the first speaker. "Must be Nick. See, it's throwing its searchlight at us! Wave, Herron! Steer toward shore. Gimme a hand, and we'll hoist this bozo, ready to drag him ashore. Hi! Look out!"

He was too late. As he turned, Phil rose from his knees in a head foremost spring.

"Take a chance!"

Ann Pirie's words rang in his memory. Perhaps the automobile was not driven by one of the gang. It might carry a neutral, whose attention he could attract before it was too late. Anyway, he could not fare worse than he had.

Taking the other fellow by surprise, Phil butted him in the middle, as he rose, with a furious dive. Caught napping, and standing unsteadily on the shaking deck, the man reeled back and collapsed heavily on the back of the unsuspecting pilot.

Phil was on his feet, which were not tied, and two backward steps carried him to the roof of the tiny cabin. Herron rushed at him, and was almost upon the apparently defenseless prisoner, when Dorn grasped the top of the cabin with his bound hands, and sat on them. Instantly his feet flew up, catching Herron a sickening jolt under the jaw.

The gangster sprawled back, bowling over his fellow thug, who was struggling to rise from the pilot's back. The three went down in a tangle of legs and arms, fighting wildly to their feet just as the rushing

power boat rammed its nose ashore with a terrific jar.

About the boat there played the blinding glare of an automobile searchlight. In it Philip saw the three gangsters rising from the shoal water into which they had been hurled. Guns leaped to their hands. What was behind the glaring light?

Two shots barked out of the darkness ashore. Herron screamed and flopped across the power boat's prow, holding his pistol hand.

"Let that guy loose!" shouted a strange, masculine voice. "Drop that rod, or I'll drill you like the other goof!"

"Phil, Phil! We're here!" cried a feminine voice, vaguely familiar. "Let him alone, you brutes!"

The searchlight switched toward the thugs, leaving Phil hidden in darkness. Wavering, the pair started to raise their hands, when another car dashed past and halted. Taking advantage of this diversion, the unwounded gangster and the pilot suddenly darted over to the second car, shouting:

"Nick! Go!"

With a roar of engine and a pattering of shots, this car raced off. A pair of soft arms encircled Phil, supporting him, while the feminine voice commanded:

"Come here, Trace, and cut Phil loose. He put up that battle with his hands tied. Some fighter!"

"So's your old man," retorted the man who had fired on the gangsters. "Wait till I frisk this bozo. Got left at the post."

From Herron the strange man took a knife, with which he cut Phil's bonds.

"Why, it's Loraine Cuyler!" Dorn suddenly exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

"Be yourself, Phil!" she retorted. "What do you suppose? Looking for you, of course! Trace and Kit decided to rejoin us, after they had turned that bandit over to the sheriff; so they drove up after us. They landed here half an hour ago, and found me wild because you hadn't returned from Mackinac. After all the queer things of the last two days, I was afraid something had happened—and apparently it had. We cruised along shore, looking for a fast boat to take me across, and we saw this one making for shore; so we drove down to meet it, hoping to charter it for a return trip. Imagine our amazement when the searchlight showed you!"

"What 'll we do with this egg, Phil?" demanded Tracy Morgan.

Dorn gaped. This stranger knew him well enough to call him by his first name! Well enough to fight for him, too!

"Let's tie him and chuck him in the cabin," suggested Philip, finally finding his voice. "Help me float this boat. I want to overtake a yacht that's running away."

"You're a glutton for trouble," grunted Tracy, heaving the groaning Herron into the power boat's form-fitting cabin. "After two nights of just one damned thing after another, I should think you'd had enough. However! Yo-heave!"

Their united efforts dislodged the power boat from the bottom. As Philip leaped to the wheel, Loraine climbed beside him, directing:

"Trace, you and Kit take care of the car. I'm going with Phil, to keep him out of trouble."

"Great grief, Lore, you mustn't—" Dorn began.

"Be yourself, Phil!" she commanded. "I'm coming along, even if you are cold to me. You certainly experienced a quick change since this afternoon. That sleeping powder must have affected your memory."

"I was hit on the head to-night," he temporized, seeing a way to get information. "I can't remember. What's happened these two days?"

Briefly she outlined Tufts's surprising adventures—Dorn's, as she supposed. Phil listened in amazement. Apparently his employer had passed through exploits as strange as his own.

"Phil," continued Loraine, "maybe you know what this is all about, but I'm going to tell you something that possibly you don't know. Since this affair to-night, I can see that there's something criminal about all this. Didn't it strike you as a peculiar coincidence that I should pop out of the past and call at your apartment that particular evening? It wasn't just a coincidence, Phil. I'm telling this regardless of the cost, so that I can undo any harm I may have done unwittingly. I was sent to your apartment that night."

"Sent?" echoed Dorn. "By whom? Why?"

"That's the worst of it—I don't know," she confessed. "A theatrical agent sent for me. I really came from Cleveland expecting an engagement, but he said I was too late. After making sure that I had known

you in Bard's Stock, he told me to come back, as he was expecting a man to call up—a man whose name he did not know. When I went back, this man was waiting. He took me outside, paid my expenses, and gave me a hundred dollars, with a promise of four hundred more in a week. All I was to do was to force myself on you and keep you diverted for three or four days—keep you shadowed, in fact. I don't know why, and I'm ashamed of my part, but I needed the money, Phil. That's all I know, if it will help in solving any puzzle you may have. That's why I kept driving away from the city. Of course, the rest was purely accidental."

Dorn did not answer. His gaze was on a dark shape putting back toward Mackinac. It was the *What Cheer*, with Ann Pirie on board.

"Loraine, would you mind crowding into the cabin with that fellow Herron for a few minutes?" he asked. "Here's his gun."

With an inquiring look, she complied, shutting the door. Phil steered straight for the approaching yacht, and hailed:

"*What Cheer*, ahoy! Stop and take me on board!"

Pursuing, he came alongside as the yacht slowed to a stop. No one aboard appeared to be interested in his approach. There was nobody in sight as he steered up, except one man waiting at the side ladder.

This man was Ramsey Tufts.

XIV

SPEEDING out to his yacht, Tufts had encountered his own tender steering for shore, and had transhipped to it. The surprised sailor concealed his curiosity about his employer's apparent change of costume, and the hired boatman, well rewarded, sped off to do some spending on the island. Except for the man on watch, the deck was deserted when Tufts boarded the vessel.

He stepped immediately into his cabin. He ordered Captain Larsen summoned, and hastily changed into fresh clothes—white ducks. Noting that one such suit was missing, he guessed how Dorn would be attired.

When Larsen came to the door, Tufts ascertained that Binturn was on board, and then ordered full speed for Chicago at once. He shut off his captain's hesitating protests by closing the door. Soon the yacht was under way. Philip Dorn would

understand, and would adapt himself to the changed situation, realizing that the real owner must be aboard. Anyhow, Dorn did not matter. Tufts wanted urgently to reach Chicago.

He had arrayed himself to his satisfaction when there came an imperious knocking at his door. Opening it, he faced a gloriously beautiful and very angry young woman.

"Mr. Tufts, the captain informs me that you have ordered full speed to Chicago!" she cried indignantly. He nodded, wondering. She stamped her foot. "This is outrageous! Inviting me to dinner and then carrying me off without warning! Order the yacht back, at once!"

Tufts had been ordered about enough in the last forty-eight hours. Her tone and words aroused his stubbornness.

"Sorry, but those are my orders," he said coldly.

At the same time he was shaking inwardly with a strange emotion. Heavens, how beautiful she was in her indignation! How she affected him!

Abruptly the girl turned and darted away to her stateroom. Tufts heard the door slam and the key turn. Shaking off the spell she had thrown over him, he sought out Binturn.

His stout guest sat placidly smoking on the observation deck. Tufts greeted him immediately with—

"Len, we're heading back for Chicago. I just had Burdick on long distance. He says that Gearing is due back to-morrow."

"Ramsey, you've kept your word not to mention anything to me on this trip, but something came up when I was ashore," replied Binturn. "A fellow spoke to me on the hotel veranda—claimed to be a reporter, and asked me point-blank if we'd closed any deal. I refused to answer. Did he get his tip from your organization?"

"Not from us, Len, as far as I know," protested Tufts.

Binturn nodded belief. They smoked in silence for a time. Again Tufts was struggling in the grip of emotion. That girl—how she moved him! He yearned to lay his name and fortune at her feet. To turn back meant losing the business deal, but what did that matter?

Abruptly he left Binturn and went to her door, where he knocked, announcing: "I am ordering the yacht back, for your sake."

Silence rewarded this. He turned away and gave the countermand to his puzzled captain. They were racing back when the hail came from the approaching power boat. Tufts recognized the voice, and ordered his crew to the opposite side of the yacht, in order to let Dorn come aboard unobserved. Together the two men stepped into the owner's cabin, duplicates in appearance, even to discarding their glasses. Briefly Dorn reported.

"Your secret—the fact that you have a double—is out, I believe," he said. "Otherwise why was a watch set on both of us? My guess is that somebody who was after you for some reason knew that you had a double, but he wasn't sure which was which. I'm willing to wring the facts out of this man Herron, if he knows them; but you'll have to take me into your confidence, Mr. Tufts. I've been taking chances in the dark too long!"

Tufts nodded. Briefly he told of the threatening letter. Dorn demanded to know how Binturn figured in the matter. His employer reluctantly explained about the efforts to buy out Binturn & Gearing. Ordering his employer to remain in the cabin, Phil started out. At the door Tufts stopped him with—

"That girl on board—who is she?"

"Her name is Ann Pirie. She's a niece of your friend Foster Kimball," answered Phil. "To-night I intend to ask her to marry me."

"I forbid it!" stormed Tufts. "Your contract—"

"Nothing will stop me," stated Dorn coldly.

"We will see!" asserted Tufts, when the door had shut.

XV

DORN led Loraine to the side stage, saying:

"Sorry to have kept you waiting. Help yourself to that fourth stateroom. Dinner ought to be ready soon."

He crowded into the power boat's cabin, and, turning on the battery light, addressed Herron.

"Your pals have left you behind to be the goat. Come clean, if you don't want to go up for several serious offenses! You know I can send you away or let you go free. Why were you gunning for me? Was it that contribution to the Anti-Crime Organization?"

"Hell, no!" replied Herron. "We don't take that outfit seriously. You ought to know that gunmen don't go after guys as high as you. We knock off one another. All I know is that we was hired for heavy sugar to make you think your life was in danger, so you'd stay away from Chi. You was sent a letter which was to start the scare, and we was to keep you worried for all this week, until we got word to lay off."

"Why did you search that man on the yacht?" demanded Phil. "Why did you take the chance to get on? And why did you signal?"

"My orders was to get on, find where you was going, and signal this power boat," groaned Herron. "This boat ought to cruise near shore, and we wanted to know where to look for you if we lost you. I was to search Binturn—sure, I knew his name—to find out if he had a signed agreement to sell. I didn't find none. We tried to search you for one on the island. Finally, when you fell into this tub to-night, we was going to hide you, to keep you away while a deal you was on went the other way. It was all a business bunk to make your stock drop and some other concern's go up. A crook who rigs the market framed it, and was playing to win both ways. I know this much—he bought the tip for five grand off a guy in your office—a guy named Langley. That's all I know. Do I get off?"

"Yes, go," urged Phil. "Now that we know, I think we won't worry about those other gunmen."

"They'd better worry, leaving me like rats!" snarled the man. "They can't hide from me; and when I find 'em—"

Phil released Herron, and went aboard the yacht, where he watched the power boat scoot away. He had settled that. Striding to Ann's stateroom, he found the door ajar and the place empty. He hurried aft, where he saw Tufts's white figure standing beside another. The millionaire was pleading:

"Ann, I want you! I'm a lonely man. My wealth—"

"No, no!" she protested. "This afternoon I did think—"

"Don't listen to him, Ann!" interrupted Dorn, brushing his employer aside. "I am the one who loves you, the one you love!"

Amazed at the spectacle of two men apparently exact counterparts suing for her

hand, Ann hesitated for a moment, and then, with a little cry, she turned to Phil and seized his arm.

"Your heart told you which was which," Dorn said. "He is worth millions, while I am only his hired double; but I will not stand silent and let him take you. I am through being him. I am going to be myself. I'll have to start all over, but I am only thirty-five. Somewhere I can make good under my own name, and—"

"Be yourself, Phil!" cried Tufts, unconsciously quoting Loraine's phrase. "You're not leaving me, even if we are going to drop the double. I've had enough pretending, too; and I'm not going to let slip a man who had nerve enough to defy me, and who has kept my confidence into the bargain. There's a place in line for head of the West Side plant ready for—Philip

Dorn. As for this, Ann knows that it was only a moment's madness."

He went forward, meeting Binturn, who announced that he would wire Gearing to wait until they returned. Tufts nodded absently.

One does not start proposing after a lifetime's restraint and then stop on a single failure. From a stateroom stepped Loraine Cuyler, saying:

"You look more like yourself now!"

Ramsey Tufts had taken his practice swing, and missed. The next time there was to be no failure. Dinner was waiting, but he led Loraine to a dark, deserted place on deck. The moon was shining, casting inky shadows.

Presently Loraine's voice, not at all rebuking, cried:

"Be yourself—Ramsey!"

THE END

THE TYRANT

OH, love, thou tyrant from the skies,
What wouldst thou have from me?
I did not know thee in the guise
Thou didst assume, nor yet surmise
That love could ever be
So sharp a thing that seemed so sweet,
My master, once my slave complete.

Thy weapons are but fragile things—
A maiden's eyes, a smile,
A gentle hand, a word that sings,
A glance, a fleeting blush that brings
A hope that doth beguile.
A foe like this one cannot slay;
The wound would drain life's self away!

No pity dost thou feel or show,
Whose smile is but for those
Who conquer in triumphant glow
Of victory, nor ever know
Of long defeat the woes.
Surrender no surcease of pain
Doth bring, for tears and prayers are vain.

Oh, master thou of bliss and grief,
Release me from thy thrall!
I only ask from love relief,
Since pain is long and life is brief,
And love and life are all.
My prayer is lost ere yet begun,
For love and life, alas, are one!

William Wallace Whitelock

Olivia's Sacred Trust

THE STORY OF A GIRL WHO HAD IT "ALL PLANNED OUT"
WHEN SHE MARRIED A PENNILESS GENIUS

By Reita Lambert

THIS is not Carl Ramsay's story. At any rate, it is not one of those Carl Ramsay stories that enliven the Sunday supplements. It is Olivia's story, and Olivia isn't at all the sort of person who would ever appear in a Sunday supplement—except between the lines. There is generally an Olivia between the lines of any celebrity's story of achievement.

She was Olivia Dare when she met Carl Ramsay at a small dinner party in New York. That was before the Sunday supplement era, when Carl was known as a "struggling young composer with a future," and Olivia was a lovely young non-entity two years out of college. Olivia learned afterward that the same urgent necessity which lay behind little *Tommy Tucker's* vocal performance had lured the young composer to Henriette Martin's dinner; but at the time it never occurred to her to think of him in connection with anything foody or practical. He was one of those celestially endowed creatures whom Henriette coaxed occasionally from the heights by the power of her gracious hospitality and excellent table.

Mrs. Martin was a vivacious widow who prided herself on rendering first aid to temperaments and budding geniuses. Her little dinners were in the nature of intellectual feasts, to which she not infrequently invited Olivia for her decorative qualities. On this particular occasion she had a double motive, for Carl Ramsay was a difficult dinner guest, and she wanted to provide him with a partner sufficiently simple-hearted to excuse his incivility on the ground of his genius.

Henriette knew perfectly well that when Carl accepted her invitations he did so reluctantly, and only because he was hungry. The composer knew with equal certainty

that he would be called upon, later, to play for his dinner. As a consequence, he made the most of the repast, to the exclusion of everything—and every one—else. It was Mrs. Martin's custom to place the least exacting of her guests beside him, and that night the distinction fell to Olivia.

It was the sort of thing that invariably happened to Olivia. She was so delightfully good-natured, her friends explained. True, she had no gift for scintillant repartee, and probably no true understanding of the arts; but her attitude toward both was one of worshipful admiration, and she was a truly nourishing listener. People talked to her—and marveled, later, that they had. Her wide blue gaze was a very suction pump for confidences. She was lovely to look upon—a winsome, dusky, dewy beauty who would have filled Goya with ecstasy.

When Henriette paired her off with Carl Ramsay, she thought:

"Now if he'll only *look* at her!"

But the clamor of Carl's mendicant appetite drowned the voice of his social conscience, and the most that Olivia got from him, between the caviar and coffee, was an occasional monosyllable.

She was grateful for what she got. She guessed that he was hungry, and rejoiced vicariously over each succeeding course. She thought it a delicious dinner, just as she thought that all Henriette's guests were either handsome, or charming, or clever. Later, in the living room—which Henriette would like to have called a salon—her friendly blue gaze followed her preoccupied dinner companion to the piano, and watched him come to life, as it were, when his hands touched the keys.

At table, she had thought him quite old. Now she decided that he was young—not more than thirty. He was handsome, too,

with long, fair hair and deep-set, brooding eyes. Each time he finished a number, he sat in austere silence, rubbing his beautiful, strong, white hands together until the wave of chatter and applause had receded. Not until the room was entirely quiet would he touch the keys.

Olivia was breathless with delight. She sat quite close to the piano and drank him in. If she had resented his indifference at dinner, she would have forgiven him now; but it was not Olivia's nature to resent anything. She had thought him inarticulate and shy, and she was genuinely happy to find that he had such an enchanting medium of self-expression.

When he finally left the piano and dropped into the vacant chair beside her, she welcomed him with flushed cheeks and an awed little smile. She did not know that he had chosen that chair simply because it was close to the piano. She timidly told him how much she had enjoyed his playing. She would have enlarged upon the theme, but, after a brief word of thanks, he seemed to retreat into some remote fastness of his own thoughts.

Certainly he would never have offered to escort her home, if it had not been for Mrs. Martin's generalship. It never occurred to Carl Ramsay to offer himself in this or any other capacity. Mrs. Martin was aware of this, though she managed, in her adroit way, to convey the impression that the idea was his.

"You don't live half a dozen blocks apart, you two," she told him ingenuously. "Olivia's a darling—I knew you would discover it; but you must take care of her, Carl. She still believes in fairies—don't you, Livvy?"

This was in the foyer. The three of them were standing near the door. Henriette's words drew Carl's reluctant gaze to the girl's face, half smothered in the black fur collar of her coat. Her blue eyes met his shyly. He thought they were the youngest eyes he had ever seen. It seemed as if they had never looked upon anything old or ugly.

Outside, the chill of late October was in the air, and Olivia ducked her chin deeper into the soft fur. Then she said:

"Oh, let's walk! It's such a lovely night!"

The composer exhaled deeply. A girl without a hat usually meant a taxi. His last ten minutes had been a horror.

"Isn't too far for you, is it?" he asked dutifully.

"My, no—I do it often," she reassured him. "You see I've only been in New York for two years, and I'm still thrilling to it."

"Horrible place, though," he returned ungraciously.

It made her feel terribly young and naïve. She felt called upon to explain:

"But for me it means so much—being able to see so many wonderful things and people! And the parties—I think Henriette's parties are splendid. I love music. I loved your playing—that last lovely thing, especially. Will you tell me what it was?"

"Oh, that! A little gavot I wrote some years ago."

"You composed it?"

"I never play anything but my own things," he told her stiffly. "I'm not a pianist."

"Oh!"

Of course, why should he play other people's music? Who could write anything more lovely than that "little gavot"?

"Remarkably pretty girl, but simple," thought Carl. "Now if she just won't talk all the way home!"

But it was Carl who talked. Mrs. Martin's apartment was in the East Fifties. They swung down Fifth Avenue, and before they had reached Thirty-Fourth Street Olivia was in possession of as many facts concerning her companion as a census taker could have elicited. By the time they were crossing Fourteenth Street, she was helping him to fill in the outlines of his prodigious dreams. They had walked a block beyond her street before they realized it, and then they decided to go on and circle Washington Square—it was really such a glorious night!

When they reached the square, they sat down on a bench to rest, and Carl was still talking. It was after midnight before they parted on the steps of the old brownstone house on Ninth Street where Olivia had a small apartment.

"Well, that was a great idea of yours—walking home," Carl said.

He had taken off his hat and tossed back his refractory mane of light hair. The old street slept quietly, a little oasis of silence hemmed in by the subdued roar of bus and elevated. A plump yellow moon rode high above the housetops.

"I loved it, every minute of it," Olivia confessed softly; "and I feel as if I'd learned a great deal. I know I'll understand good music lots better after this!"

"If you would care to have that little gavot—"

"Oh, I would!"

"I'll drop in with it—let's see—to-morrow afternoon?"

"Please do! I get home from the office about five. We'll have tea, if you'll come then."

"I will, thanks. Good night!"

Olivia gave him her hand—and her eyes. When Carl Ramsay was confronted by a reflective surface, he always looked into it for his own image magnified to godlike proportions. To-night, looking down into Olivia Dare's honest blue eyes, he had his wish.

II

It was not long past noon on the following day, and Mrs. Martin was still in her *robe de chambre* and a mask of cold cream, when she heard Olivia's name chanted from the doorway.

"Just bring her in—oh, there you are! Take the corset off that chair, and sit down. I thought you were a young woman with a job!"

"I always take a walk at the noon hour," Olivia said casually. "Thought I'd pay my party call."

"Humph!" Mrs. Martin picked up a square of linen and began to mop her face. Her shrewd gray eyes studied her caller suspiciously before she inquired: "Well, did our genius stick until you were safely home?"

"Oh, yes. He is a genius, isn't he?"

"Ha!" Her lids narrowed. "How do you know that, my innocent?"

"Oh, I can tell—I sort of feel it. He's so different, isn't he?"

"If having the world's largest ingrowing ego and an income that can't be seen with the naked eye makes him different—"

"But is he really poor, Henny? I wanted to ask you. Of course, from some things he said, I knew he wasn't rich."

"He's as poor as a church mouse, whatever that is," Mrs. Martin said dryly.

"But how terrible! A man so gifted—"

"My child, he's a composer, and all composers are poor—unless they write 'Don't Bring Lulu,' or some beneficent millionaire takes 'em under his wing. But

nothing like that's going to happen to Carl. He's too disagreeable."

"Why, how can you say such a thing?" Olivia demanded, shocked. "I think he's perfectly marvelous!"

Olivia thought nearly every one perfectly marvelous, or darling, or sweet. The adjective would not have alarmed Mrs. Martin had it not been accompanied by a fluctuating color in the girl's smooth cheeks and a shy flutter of her long lashes. These were disturbing symptoms.

Mrs. Martin faced her mirror and picked up her powder puff.

"You're not the first young idiot to think that, my dear," she said casually. "That's Carl's chief article of diet—admiration. Feed it to him, if you like, but don't expect any returns from your investment. These art people don't pay returns."

"He told me all about the opera he's trying to write," Olivia recalled dreamily.

"He would."

"I'm sure it will be a great opera."

"No one doubts his ability, Livvy."

"He said that if he could just be set free from financial worries for a year, he could finish it."

"Don't shed any tears over that situation, child. Other composers have had the same problems, and have overcome them."

"He's coming to tea," Olivia said. "You know, I don't believe he gets enough to eat. He ought to have some one to take care of him."

It was this that sent Mrs. Martin to the telephone as soon as the front door had closed on her caller. Her mouth set grimly when she heard Carl Ramsay's voice.

"Listen to your auntie, Carlo," she fixed his attention. "Jeannette Darsey wants a new number for her program at Carnegie next month. I suggested your 'Moonlight' song."

"Don't think she could do it," came the unmoved reply.

Mrs. Martin set her lips more snugly.

"Well, drop in, and we'll talk about it. Come along this evening—early. I'm going out later. Pop in around eight, like a good boy."

When he came, she wanted to know if he was hungry.

"How about a sandwich? Mary'll fix one in a jiff."

"Thanks, I've just come from having tea," he said, and arranged his long legs before the fire.

"Tea doesn't mean real food."

"It did to-day. As a matter of fact, I had tea with that young friend of yours—Miss Dare."

"What, Olivia? You never condescended to that extent!"

"She's a charming girl."

"Don't tell me that! I've known her since she was one. She's a darling, but I hardly expected *you'd* find her so."

"Why not?" he asked, and patted back a yawn.

It was plain that Olivia was still safe so far as Mr. Ramsay was concerned. Mrs. Martin meant to insure that safety.

"My dear man, Olivia's the original little milkmaid. She knows as much about music—any of the so-called arts, for that matter—as I know about bees. She doesn't belong to your world—or mine. Some day she'll marry a rich grocer and have half a dozen children. Hope she does! She's always been poor. Her mother died when she was twelve, and she worked her way through college. Now she's got her first job—she designs baby clothes. Talk about the fitness of things!"

"Interesting," he admitted lazily.

"Isn't it?" Mrs. Martin lit a cigarette and studied his handsome, half sullen face. "Speaking of marriage, Carl, why on earth don't you set your trap for a nice wealthy widow? No—not me. I'm overdrawn at the bank this minute."

She sighed when he left her, a sigh blended of relief and guilt. She had been shameless about poor little Livvy, but she had shown Carl that here was no kindred soul worthy of a man who had already gained some recognition as a genius. Yet she was to know—and soon—that her friendly intervention had been ill timed.

Though he was not stupid, Carl Ramsay never suspected the motive underlying that interview. He had just come from Olivia, who had ministered to him, body and soul. Mrs. Martin's words only served to endow her with greater substance in his mind. As for Olivia's limitations, as outlined by her friend, it was evident that Mrs. Martin did not know the girl.

He had dinner with Olivia on the following evening at her little apartment. That was the first of many. On an average of three times a week Olivia fed him. In return, he played for her on an infinitesimal baby grand in her small living room. Afterward, before the fire, he shaped and colored

his dreams so that she might share in their reflected glory.

On a night in December when they had followed this routine, Olivia went with him into the hall while he got into his coat. In the midst of the buttoning up process, she reached out and grabbed a futile little knob of thread.

"My goodness! Did you save it?"

"Save what?" he wanted to know.

"The button. You've lost a button. It's cold, too—you ought to have that button."

Still clinging to the knob of thread, she looked up at him. The laughter in her eyes died out, and the corners of her mouth began to tremble; and then she was in his arms, strained close to the shabby coat, her lips crushed beneath his.

It was the first time in his thirty-two years that Carl Ramsay had lost sight of the ecstatic, heartburning ambitions that had been the *motif* of his entire self-centered life; but now, for a moment, oblivion, perfect and divine, was his.

"You sweet, sweet thing! Livvy, I love you—I love you!"

The words broke the spell. He dropped his arms and stood away from her. They were both shaken. Olivia's eyes were misty, but there was a tremulous smile of triumph on her lips. Carl looked at her in almost comical dismay.

"My God! What have I done?"

"You've said you love me!" Olivia replied happily.

"But, I can't—I mustn't!"

"You *do*!" she gloated softly.

"My—my dear—I've no right! I can't support myself, let alone a wife!"

"Of course you can't," she agreed, and plucked shyly at the knob of thread left on his coat by the missing button. "Why, you can't even remember to keep your buttons!"

He took her in his arms again with a sort of fierce desperation.

"Livvy, say you don't love me!"

"But I do!"

"But what on earth are we going to do?" he said, after another moment in which the taste of his triumph was made bitter by dismay.

"We're going to get married, of course," replied Olivia calmly.

"Married on what?"

"On two hundred a month—that's my salary."

"Heavens! That's as much as I make in a year on royalties!"

"Of course it is," she said. "It's heaps for us both. You see, I've got it all planned out—"

"You *have!*"

The color flamed in her face.

"I mean," she explained, "that I've always known it was enough for two."

"But I—I can't live on your money, Livvy!"

"Why, of course you can," she told him belligerently. "It isn't your fault that the work you do doesn't bring in any money. Think how wonderful it will be for me, some day when you're rich and famous, to know that I helped! We love each other. Why shouldn't I help? And think, Carl—you can do your opera! You won't have to be worried about money, and you can have all your time to work on the opera! Oh, it's all so simple, dear!"

And simple it certainly appeared in the light of Olivia's selfless, overwhelming love. Two days later they were married.

III

HERETOFORE his ambition and self-interest had eclipsed all else on Carl Ramsay's horizon. Now he made room—not much room, it is true—for love and Olivia.

The marriage created a small stir in the circles where they were known. Carl's friends opined that marriage would be fatal to his career—especially marriage with a girl who had nothing to recommend her but a pretty face. If he had been bent upon marriage, why couldn't he have chosen a woman with money?

Olivia's friends were unanimous in the belief that she had thrown herself and her beauty away on a penniless egoist too lazy to do anything but write "pieces" that nobody could play. They said that it was a shame—that there ought to be a law to prevent such things.

Henriette Martin, with a foot in both camps, as it were, had a double perspective. She, too, thought his marriage a premature blight on Carl's career. He had thrown himself away, but why did he have to throw himself away, on a sweet, unselfish little thing like Olivia? Carl was not the sort of man to assume the responsibilities of marriage. For thirty-two years he had carefully shirked anything that remotely resembled responsibility; and marriage with Olivia meant responsibility. For all

her efficiency and independence, she was an old-fashioned girl. She would have babies. There would be poverty and squalor and dissension. It was tragic!

Mrs. Martin went to see them in Olivia's little apartment, and found them both looking radiant.

"Now, what am I going to say to you?" she asked Olivia.

"Ask me if I've a little genius in my home," came the triumphant retort.

She tried Carl:

"Look here, man! Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"No, he's not," Olivia answered for him. "Besides, he couldn't help himself. I made him do it. I was selfish. I wanted a hand in his work. I wanted to be able to say that I'd helped. I think he was just darling and unselfish to let me have my way!"

Mrs. Martin gave it up. What could she produce to combat an attitude like that? When she left, Olivia followed her into the hall and smothered her with a prodigious hug.

"Livvy, you precious little fool!"

"I'm not. I think I was awfully clever to manage it. You see, I planned it all out. Why shouldn't Carl share my home and my money, when we loved each other? Oh, Henny, I love him so! And Carl loves me—oh, he does!"

If Mrs. Martin had any doubts on that score, she kept them to herself; but she went away with a chill on her heart. Olivia had it all planned out, but she had left no blank spaces in her plans for the inevitable scribblings of fate.

In a month, the marriage was *passe* as a subject for tea table chatter, and the pair retreated into the undisturbed fastnesses of their own happiness. Carl took up his residence in Olivia's little apartment, but retained his bleak and naked studio on Sixteenth Street for composition. The part-time position created for him in the office of his publishers was relinquished at Olivia's command—"so that he might have all his time for the work nearest his heart."

In the beginning he found the prodigality of affection heaped upon him a little disquieting; but Olivia's was a self-nourishing affection that incurred no sense of bondage. Her love was its own reward, and so lavishly and happily did she bestow it that presently Carl was accepting it as a component element of his new régime.

These were heavenly days for Olivia. A dusky little "visiting maid" assumed the domestic and culinary responsibilities of the apartment. Olivia went to her office on wings and returned by the same agency. Well fed and untroubled, Carl launched his new work.

At first they breakfasted together, but as the opera took more aggressive possession of Carl's thoughts he contracted the habit of drifting of an evening to the little piano in the living room. There he stayed, often until midnight or after, sleeping late the following morning.

The greater the demands made upon him by his work, the more prodigal and self-effacing became Olivia's protecting love. Sometimes, when she ached for the touch of his hands or lips, she would combat the pain by reproaching herself bitterly. She had married a genius—she was nurturing a heaven-sent gift. Who was she, to set herself up as rival of the intangible gods he worshiped?

Always she carried, folded deep in her heart, the conviction that Carl would never have married her had she not caught him on that first, devastating wave of emotion, and lured him by coloring his own avid dreams. That he loved her as much as a man may whose heart has long been dedicated to a divine mistress, she did not doubt; but Carl Ramsay had not wanted a wife or marriage. Indeed, she often wondered if he fully realized his status, so little did their alliance resemble the conventional marriage, so assiduously had she shielded him.

Sometimes she would lie in bed while he worked, her long, dark hair sheathed in two stout braids. Here the monotonous chords which were the birth pangs of the new opera would reach her. Occasionally she would catch a bit of wistful melody that would speak to her like a promise.

Here, too, Carl would sometimes come to her on the wave of that dark despair which is one of the penalties of art. She would take his head in her arms, and croon over him, and smooth his hair, and he would rediscover her.

"Livvy, you're a blessed angel!"

Her happiness would well nigh choke her.

They gave a party now and then. Carl would play on the tiny piano, and Olivia would look lovely and demure, while inwardly she was swollen to the bursting

point with pride. Happy, triumphant months these, lived fully and fearlessly, according to the plans that Olivia had laid so carefully!

Spring was preening herself voluptuously before Olivia's sound young body was assailed by an unusual lassitude—a lowering of physical and mental energy that brought depression in its wake. The opera was well under way by now. His long hours of work affected Carl like a drug. He came dreary-eyed and irritable from his studio, spent long hours in preoccupied silence, slept fitfully. Olivia whipped herself to meet his need. Her cherishing arms were as healing as ever, and if her step dragged and her eyes took on a hollow despair, he did not notice it.

It was not until long after she was certain of the prank that fate had played her that she confessed her secret. For weeks she had been prodding herself to the ordeal before an opportune moment presented itself.

It was an April evening, and Carl had thrown himself on the davenport before the fire after his dinner. Olivia waited until the little maid had finished washing the dishes and gone. Then she went over and sat down, very straight and prim, on a chair near the davenport.

A sense of honor kept her from throwing herself into his arms. That, she decided, would be taking an unfair advantage, and her feeling of guilt was already overwhelming. If Carl had not wanted a wife, or marriage, he certainly had not wanted babies. Babies had had no place in the plans she had drawn up for him.

She sat in silence for a moment, hoping that he would speak, before she began, in a timid little voice, her pale face flushing painfully:

"Carl, dear, you're not going to work to-night?"

"No—I'm dog-tired."

"That's good—I mean that you're not going to try and work." There followed a pause, and then she made another effort: "Carl, dear, I—I wanted to tell you. I—there's something—"

He dragged his eyes open and looked at her. She was sitting on the extreme edge of the chair, twisting her hands in her lap. The corners of her mouth were trembling, and her cheeks scarlet.

"Anything the matter?" he wanted to know, and propped himself up on his elbow.

"Goodness, no! Nothing serious." Then, in a terrible rush: "You see, dear, it isn't going to make any difference. They're going to give me more money at the office next year—they told me so. Anyway, heaps of business women have 'em and keep right on with their jobs. It's just a matter of efficient arrangement. It'll give us an opportunity to go to the country for the summer. I'm sure we can find something cheap, and the office is going to let me off for three months. You can go right on with the opera."

"For Heaven's sake, Livvy, what *are* you talking about?"

"The baby," gasped Olivia, and essayed an apologetic little smile. "I—I'm going to have a baby, Carl!"

"Holy cats!"

"I know," she said quickly, "just how you feel, dear. Of course, I wanted one some time, but—well, perhaps it's best this way. Why, really, it isn't going to make any difference—about money, or your work, or anything. And it's so nice to have it in the summer—"

"The summer!"

"Well, early in September. I can be back to work by the 1st of October. I didn't want to tell you any sooner than I had to, but now I've got it all planned out—"

Her voice trailed off. Carl sat staring straight before him, until suddenly it dawned upon him that Olivia was crying silently, sitting there bolt upright in her chair, and not even using her handkerchief, so fearful was she that he might notice. There was something so comical and pathetic in the picture that he laughed. Then he bounded across to her and took her in his arms.

For the space of two minutes, perhaps, she gave herself to the heavenly abandon of tears. Then she straightened purposefully, and began to repair her damaged complexion.

"I've got it all planned out," she repeated, and they both went off into gales of laughter. When she had dried her eyes—on his handkerchief, this time—she went on: "We'll go to the country about the middle of June. I'll find a nice, cheap little house, and we'll rent a piano. Think how quiet it will be for your work! I'll keep house. I'll have enough saved by then to see us through the summer; and country doctors are lots cheaper than city

ones. When we come back, we'll get a larger apartment, because I'm going to have a big raise." The weight of confession lifted, her spirits soared. "Why, it's really nothing at all, having babies these days. Why, if a woman is healthy and capable, there's nothing to it!"

IV

THE following months seemed to bear out Olivia's optimism. Carl forgot about it almost at once, apparently, absorbed in the enchantment of his work. Olivia worked with renewed vigor, her guilty secret metamorphosed into a lovely warm glow about her heart. She began to hunt basement bargains after working hours, and evenings found her sewing under the lamp on some impalpable bit of batiste or snowy linen.

A curious sense of loyalty made her lay aside her needle and tuck the little garments out of sight whenever Carl left the piano; and when they talked, as of old, before the fire, it was of his work. Her Saturdays she spent in the country searching for the "cheap little house" of her plans, and from one of these excursions she came back victorious. After this there was her own apartment to sublet.

During their final weeks in town, Olivia dismissed the little dusky maid, so that she might add to her savings; and so absorbed in his work was Carl, and so efficiently did she manage, that it was some days before he noticed the lack. He protested mildly, but was reassured by her emphatic—

"I feel perfectly fine! It won't hurt me a bit!"

When June was in its prime, they went into the country. The house that Olivia had found lay back a mile or so from a small Connecticut village, in a nest of rolling hills. It was a low-roofed little white house, an eighth of a mile from its nearest neighbor. There were some noble old trees in the yard, and a tangle of rosebushes and neglected shrubs. There was an ugly little parlor, with a riot of roses on the carpet and a "parlor set" done in bright red plush. There was a pump in the kitchen, sole basis for the ambitious phrase "modern conveniences" which the owner had inserted in his advertisement.

Carl was horrified at the primitive arrangements of the house, but Olivia said:

"You wait until you see what's in store for you." She led him outside. "We'll practically live outdoors. Just look!"

He followed her pointing finger to where a busy little river cut through the green of a sloping field.

"Who needs a bathroom, with that lovely thing practically in the back yard? You can have a plunge every morning. Now, come along!"

She took him by the hand and led him across the long grass to a weathered little building tucked beneath the protecting arms of a gnarled old apple tree. Three weeks before, this had been a crazy woodshed, packed to the roof with derelict odds and ends—broken furniture, rusty tools, newspapers, rags. Now, when she flung the door wide with the gesture of an empress opening the gates of her kingdom, Carl had a glimpse of scrubbed boards, a strip or two of bright carpet, and a couple of comfortable chairs, and, in the far corner, the soft gleam of polished mahogany which was his piano.

"A studio for *monsieur*!" Olivia said grandly, and gestured him inside.

For twenty-four hours Carl had been nursing a sullen resentment against the emergency that necessitated his moving in the very midst of his hero's difficult love theme. Now, however, it lifted, and he turned to Olivia with a pleased grin.

"You wonder! How did you do it?"

"It was an old woodshed," she told him pridefully. "I had it all cleaned out and fixed up. I rented the piano from a place in Stamford. It's a good one, too, I think. The old farmer next door—he's a darling—helped. I knew you'd never be able to work in that ugly little parlor."

"This is perfect!" he said, and went to the piano.

Olivia watched him with happy eyes while he lifted the lid and touched the keys. Five minutes later she tiptoed out and went back to the house, to unpack the trunks.

At the beginning, Olivia found her work terribly hard. In the first place, the ugly little house, with its florid wall paper and golden oak and red plush, was a constant affront to her beauty loving soul. Then the lack of conveniences—the heavy pump in the kitchen, the uncertain temperament of the oil stove—these made housework heartbreaking labor.

Carl was surprised that they were to do without help. Olivia was careful not to tell him that there was no column in her budget for service.

"I've nothing else to do," she said. "Besides, I love to keep house."

The grocery man came by three times a week for orders, but generally she forgot some important item, and this meant a walk to the village, a mile away. From one of these excursions Carl saw her returning, her arms laden with bundles. He went to meet her, shouting a greeting; but when he saw her face, the smile left his lips. He took her packages, and remembered her condition with a shock.

"Look here, I don't think you ought to be doing this sort of thing," he said.

"Serves me right," she panted. "I forgot potatoes!"

He followed her into the house, an indefinable fear upon him. She looked pathetically white and worn. All his life he had shrunk from suffering and avoided invalids. He had a horror of sickly, ailing people.

"This is a God forsaken place to be sick, isn't it?" he said. "Where's the nearest doctor, anyway? Have you—"

"Why, of course I have, silly!" she laughed. "He lives in the village—he's an old dear, too. I've got it all arranged. All we have to do, when the time comes, is to skip across the fields to the Norrises, and they'll telephone. Mrs. Norris is the most precious old lady! I've been over there half a dozen times. She told me to count on her in an emergency. The doctor will bring the nurse with him." She patted Carl's hand. "You're not to worry, darling. How's the muse behaving?"

"Like a lamb," he told her with relief. "Come on out to the studio and hear my new tune."

He hated the funny little house, and spent three-fourths of his time in the woodshed. Every morning he tramped across the field in his bathrobe and plunged into the river. Olivia followed, and sat on the bank to applaud his bravery. He was looking remarkably brown and handsome, albeit the tinkle of his piano followed Olivia about her housework eight hours out of the day.

It seemed to Olivia that she became less efficient in the matter of that housework as the weeks passed. She no longer walked to the village for forgotten culinary items. Instead, she went across the fields to the Norris farmhouse and the telephone.

Mrs. Norris, a neat little old lady with a lined and weathered face that reminded

Olivia of a dried fig, had watched her new neighbors with growing asperity.

"My land!" she was wont to say to her husband. "You'd think that girl's man would take better care of her!"

The day came when she could silence her indignation no longer. Olivia had rushed over to borrow some baking powder. It was too late to expect the grocer to deliver it.

"My child, I ain't got so much as a grain of baking powder in the house. I just made a pan of biscuits—"

"I was going to make some myself," Olivia said. "You see, I forgot to order bread."

"Well, why don't that big, strong husband of yours go down town and get some?" inquired the old lady sharply.

"Oh, he's working. I couldn't interrupt him."

"My land! He ain't doin' nothin' but playin' that piano! I can hear it 'way over here!"

Olivia smiled at her lack of perception, and tried to explain.

"Exactly. My husband's a composer, you see. If I were to interrupt him in the midst of an inspiration, he might never be able to recapture it. It's my job to protect him from interruption. It's a—a sort of sacred trust I've undertaken."

"Sacred trust, is it?" repeated Mrs. Norris grimly. Then, with a sudden impulse, she bent and kissed the delicate, girlish cheek of her new neighbor. "Here—you take half these biscuits. I got a sight more than I need."

Olivia had a dread of the silent country nights; but since Carl insisted that he could not spend an evening in company with the red plush parlor set, she was forced to conquer her fears. There were still many things to be done, and no time to do them, save in the evening, when the last of the supper dishes had been dried and placed on the shelf.

While she sewed under the lamp in the tiny parlor, Carl remained in the studio, poring over some musical textbook or improvising softly. Toward the end, when the last bit of catstitching had been done on the last small slip, she would join him there, and would curl up like an apologetic little mouse in one of the comfortable chairs.

A dozen tall candles gave them quite an illumination. Sometimes Carl would play

for her, and she loved that. With the mellow candlelight upon his bent head and his beautiful, supple hands, with melody drenching the fragrant night, the place seemed an exclusive little paradise for a girl in love and her lover.

V

ONE late August evening Olivia had been sitting thus for an hour when she uncurled herself and went quietly into the house. For almost the first time during their country residence, it was raining. Carl was at the piano, and whenever he took his hands off the keys he could hear the soft pattering of the rain on the roof. Some of the candles were guttering out when he looked around and saw that Olivia's chair was empty. He turned questioningly toward the door just as she came in.

She had thrown on a loose raincoat, but he caught a glimpse of her rose negligee beneath it. Her dark hair was braided neatly, and trailed childishly over her shoulders. She was smiling, but something in her pallor, and in the way she stood there clutching the door jamb, startled him.

"My dear, is anything the matter?"

"No—that is, nothing serious; but—but will you run over next door and phone for the doctor?"

"Livvy!" He was horribly frightened—shaking. "Are you—are you suffering?"

"My goodness, I'm all right. Nothing's going to happen just yet, but you'd better—" She stopped, put a hand on his arm, and gripped it until her fingers bit deep into the flesh. "I'll go in," she said after a moment. "Everything's all ready. You see—I braided my hair. Better put on your rubbers, dear."

He helped her into the house. He had never felt more helpless, more completely terrified. They went into the parlor, where Olivia sat down and took hold of the chair arms. Carl hovered fearfully between that chair and the door.

"I oughtn't to leave you," he said. "My God, what shall we—"

"You'd better go, please, dear. Don't forget your rubbers!"

He went tearing across the fields to the darkened farmhouse, and beat a frantic tattoo on the door.

"It's I—Ramsay! My wife's ill! Will you get the doctor?"

"Poor little soul!" he heard Mrs. Norris say from the upflung window. "Hurry

back to her. I'll be right over, soon as I can throw something on!"

He wanted to stay. There was comfort in that strong, self-assured voice. Instead, he obeyed its sharp command and hurried back through the slanting rain, led by a stab of yellow light from the window of the little parlor.

Olivia had crawled upstairs. He found her crouching by the bed in what they had jokingly called their spare room. It was a small, stuffy room with sloping ceilings, matting on the floor, and a golden oak bed and bureau; but there were fresh doilies about, and a vase of daisies, and a new candle burned brightly on a table beside the bed. Beside the bed, too, was something that looked like a laundry basket. Indeed, it was a laundry basket, beautifully disguised and tufted in snowy, downy white, with bits of pink ribbon showing here and there.

"I lit the oil stove and put the kettle on," Olivia said, when she saw him. "Don't worry, dear! I'll be all right."

But her valor could not hold longer against the thing that assailed her. Carl hung there in the doorway, all but paralyzed. To see the valiant and resolute Olivia a victim of this vague and formidable agony was like watching the demolition of some infallible elemental force. Then, too, he was conscious of a terrible personal loss. He had no one to turn to in his terror.

The sound of voices at the front door sent him scurrying down the stairs, in an almost hysterical condition. He found the doctor, a plump and genial little man, with an angular woman in white, and little Mrs. Norris. He clutched frantically at the doctor's arm.

"She's upstairs. My God, isn't there something—"

"Tut, tut! Keep your head on your shoulders, man!"

The rain came down steadily all night. Carl could hear it rushing into the rain barrel at the corner of the house. The doctor was upstairs, and the angular woman in white—whose name, she told him, was Miss Dunn—took possession of the lower floor. It was she who thwarted his ineffectual attempts to penetrate the horrid mysteries of the spare room. Once she stumbled over him crouching abjectly on the stairs, and lost her temper.

"For goodness' sake! I might have broken my neck! Why don't you go and lie down, Mr. Ramsay?"

"Isn't it almost over?"

"No," she snapped.

In desperation, he went out to his studio. The rain stung his hot face, and the wet earth was like a sponge under his feet. He was terribly angry with Miss Dunn—and with the doctor, too. If Olivia knew the way they were treating him, she would be furious!

In the studio, he lit a match and found fresh candles. He was trembling horribly. He had never needed comfort, he had never needed Olivia's cherishing hand, as he needed it now.

He suddenly remembered that it was because of Olivia that he was suffering. She couldn't comfort him now, if she would!

He went across to the piano. In his ears there still vibrated a small, awful sound that had reached him as he crouched upon the stairs. If he could just blot out that sound—mechanically his hands went to the piano keys. He struck a chord—another. They sobbed convulsively in the rain-pelted little building, and he knew that he had transposed to the piano the piteous moan of a woman in torment.

All through the night he tacked a panicky course between the house and studio. At dawn the rain had ceased and the world stood, soaked and shivering, in the chilly gray light.

He saw Miss Dunn's white-clad figure coming out of the kitchen door, and went to meet her. Her face was hollowed with fatigue and gray as the sullen sky.

"How is she? Is she—is she—"

"Yes, yes, she's all right, Mr. Ramsey." There was a curious soft note in her voice. "But I'm afraid she hadn't taken very good care of herself."

The nurse had made up her mind not to like him—a man who couldn't take any better care of his wife than that. Oh, Mrs. Norris had told her some things; but common humanity could not hold against his stricken face. She laid her hand on his arm.

"It had to be either the baby or your wife, Mr. Ramsay. Don't take it too hard. Maybe it's for the best. You must bear up for her sake."

But he was scarcely listening. Out of that kindly jumble of words one thing alone was clear—Olivia was all right. He

must see her, speak to her, get the memory of those ghastly sounds out of his mind.

As he followed the nurse through the kitchen, he heard the doctor working the pump. At the door of Olivia's room, Miss Dunn said:

"You can only stay a minute—mind!"

The little room was very quiet now, the bed very neat and smooth, save for the slender ridge that was Olivia. Her braids looked startlingly dark and heavy against the white counterpane, just as her lashes looked heavy against the transparent pallor of her cheeks. She seemed to lift them with an effort when she heard his step. For a fleeting instant, before her eyes found him, he saw in them the reflection of the formidable foe whom she had met and barely vanquished that night. Then they came to rest on him, and suddenly filled with swift compassion.

"Poor lamb!" she whispered. "Poor darling!"

He dropped on his knees beside the bed, and she felt his forehead hot against her hand.

"Oh, Livvy! This has been—terrible!"

"Yes, dear—terrible. Try not to grieve!"

Miss Dunn swooped down upon him then and bore him away.

"The idea of that poor thing trying to talk!" she scolded, but her touch on his arm was gentle as she led him downstairs to the ugly little parlor.

The doctor was there, drawing on his coat. He had some things to say to Carl, and he said them kindly enough. Olivia had been—still was—very ill. They must take every precaution. Naturally the loss of her baby hadn't helped matters.

The baby! Carl looked at him stupidly. Why, of course, there was to have been a baby! The baby, indeed, was the author of all that night of misery. Oddly enough, Carl had lost sight of that; and yet it was not odd, either. For him the baby had never been a reality. When he had thought of it at all, he had thought of it as Olivia's baby—a nebulous creature with which he was only remotely concerned.

But now, in some vague way, the doctor was making him responsible. He was assuming that Carl would be broken-hearted over his loss, when, as a matter of fact, Carl was conscious of no loss. He supposed that Carl would be interested in all sorts of grim and rather shocking details con-

cerning Olivia and her dead son. His constant reiteration of the phrase "your wife" seemed to locate Carl as the very pivot of a domestic machine from which Olivia had carefully excluded him.

Restive and weary, Carl only half listened to that kindly monologue. Then, suddenly, he was aware that Miss Dunn was in the room. They were speaking of the baby again. He would want to see the baby!

It was the last thing he wanted to see. The thought of death was repulsive to him. The reality had never touched him; but some new sixth sense warned him that he must conceal his reluctance.

He noticed, for the first time, the presence of the glorified clothes basket. It had been brought down and placed on the red plush sofa. Well, he would close his eyes, he decided.

He found himself standing beside the sofa. Miss Dunn folded back a snowy blanket, and Carl did not close his eyes; for there, lying in the tender, spotless little nest Olivia had prepared for it, lay a tiny but utterly perfect replica of himself. It was appalling that anything so small and lifeless should be so like; but there he was, in every miniature detail.

Carl's first reaction to the phenomenon was blank astonishment; and then the profound miracle was clear. That funny, wizened little young-old creature lying there was part of himself—his son!

In that one brief moment he lived all the thrilled anticipation and swollen pride of fatherhood, and all the bitter grief of its loss. His cry of awakening and defeat filled the ugly little room:

"Oh, my God! My son!"

VI

For days Olivia lay white and motionless, but her inertia troubled no one save Carl. The doctor and the nurse nodded their approval of her condition, and knew that in their patient's mute passivity new combative forces were being marshaled.

Carl superintended the details accruing to that eerie miniature of himself. He filled in the checks that Olivia had already signed, and knew, for the first time, a burning chagrin that they should bear her name. For nearly a fortnight the piano was mute. Dust gathered on its satiny surface and crafty spiders spun their webs in the rafters of the studio.

Then, one day, Olivia spoke her anxiety: "I'm afraid you think the piano would bother me, dear. It wouldn't, really. I hate to think you're losing all this time on my account!"

So he went out and opened the piano. Propped on the rack was the penciled score of his opera. Aimlessly he played a few bars from the last page; then he took the sheet down, quietly tore it twice across, and tossed the fragments on the floor. After that he went through the entire score from the beginning, studying it carefully, playing a bar or two here and there—and the heap of ragged scraps on the floor grew. At the end of two hours the labor of months was a little handful of black cinders on the grass behind the studio.

When he had watched the last spark flicker out, he sighed and lit a cigarette. Then he went back to the piano.

For nearly four weeks Olivia remained upstairs in the spare room. They were terrible weeks, but in the end they found Olivia with a promise of the old fire in the bottom of her blue eyes. She had been sitting up for some days before she dared ask for her check book. As she studied it, her old sense of guilt and failure returned. Certainly there had been something the matter with her splendid calculations. There were all sorts of items in that check book for which she had made no provision.

Looking back, it seemed as if this had been so from the beginning. She had made no provision for her baby. Perhaps that was why he had been taken away from her. Perhaps the unseen forces that order life had gauged her incapacity, and had decided that she could not mother genius and her baby as well.

It was a bitter conclusion, but she faced it squarely. She still had Carl, and Carl had his great work. If she had sacrificed the child of her body for the child of his brain, she would not fail there. Next time she would have to make her plans more carefully.

At the end of the fourth week Carl carried her downstairs. Miss Dunn was packing her suit case. The doctor was tramping up and down the parlor. Carl's face looked drawn and pale. Olivia was no sooner ensconced on the red plush sofa than she took the doctor to task.

"What have you been doing to Mr. Ramsay? Oh, I heard you jabbering down here! You've been frightening him!"

"Humph!" The doctor's shrewd old eyes zigzagged between them. "You be careful, or I'll put you back to bed. As a matter of fact, I've been laying down the law to this husband of yours. *He* has some respect for my orders."

"I'm through taking orders from you," Olivia told him. "I feel fine!"

The old gentleman went on as if she had not spoken.

"Five hours a day flat on your back," he said; "and you're not to walk any farther than Mr. Ramsay's studio—hear? At the end of a month, we'll see."

"Five hours a day! Well, I'll never do it! It's utterly preposterous! Why, I never heard of—"

"If she's going to go on like this," the doctor broke in pleasantly, "you'd better tell Miss Dunn not to bother to pack, Mr. Ramsay."

"But I can't do it, I tell you!" wailed Olivia. "Why, I've got to get back to my job in a couple of weeks!"

"And if she talks any more about jobs," the doctor finished a long harangue, "just spank her!"

Five minutes afterward he trundled Miss Dunn out to his battered old car. Carl watched them from the doorway until they drove off; then he returned to Olivia. The traces of her angry tears were still on her cheeks.

"The idea!" she scolded. "The old fuss! Why, I feel perfectly all right!" She stood up to prove it, and teetered weakly into Carl's arms. "Well, I *will* feel all right in a few days," she sobbed.

"In a few weeks, perhaps," he corrected, and carried her back to the sofa.

She dried her eyes and spoke very firmly.

"All right—I'll be perfectly angelic for two weeks, but that's all. After that I'm going back to town, or I won't have any job."

"You won't have a job anyway, Livvy," Carl said quietly. "I'm the one who's going to have a job, my dear."

"Why, Carl!" She drew away to get a better look at his face—the face that had changed so indefinitely during those last four weeks. "What do you mean? Why, dear, you can't be serious! Think of the opera—you can't stop work on it now!"

"There isn't any opera, Livvy." Her white face began to work like a child's. "I've burned it up, dear—every last page."

"Burned it! Carl, you never!"

"It was no good," he explained, and began to stroke her hair. "It was rotten—worthless. It didn't have anything in it but myself. How could it? I've never looked anywhere but—inside. The picture wasn't pretty—not at all the sort of thing you'd want to make public. Do you understand, my darling?"

She was sobbing uncontrollably against his breast.

"Oh, Carl, I've failed! Our marriage has turned out just as every one said it would! After all my efforts, I've failed—in everything!"

"No, little wife, you haven't failed," he said firmly. "Don't think that! You see, I know what you're thinking, my darling. Don't think you've made your sacrifices in

vain. You've succeeded beyond your wildest dreams." He drew her closer. "And don't worry about the opera, Livvy. I've started another, and you can bet that this one won't be torn up!"

That opera has been sufficiently in the public eye and ear to need no further eulogies here. Not many know, however, that it took something like five years in the writing, and was written then, only after the maw of daily necessity had been properly fed.

Deprived of one sacred trust, Olivia soon substituted another—a girl; and neither Carl nor Olivia ever think of their first-born as dead, for his coming marked the birth of Carl Ramsay's soul—and a soul is deathless.

WHILE TIME SMILES ON

*Where, old fellow, are you going,
Eyes unseeing and yet glowing?*

I have memories to follow
That are far more sound and sweet
And more golden than your hollow
Gilt successes of the street;
I have memories to follow
That are charming friends to meet;

Memories that yield a rustle
Eloquent of rich brocade,
Ride the million-footed bustle
Lightly as a verse by Præd;

Memories of tunes as mellow
And as fond as "Home, Sweet Home";
Hearty laughs at Punchinello;
Reverence of Greece and Rome;

Memories of Booth and Barrett,
Minstrel shows and Buffalo Bill,
Panoramas, ale and claret,
Manners and the smooth quadrille.

I have memories to follow
That to you are obsolete
As the Belvedere Apollo,
But as firm against defeat;
I have memories to follow
That are nourishing as wheat!

*Youth, old fellow, is but building
Memories like those you're gilding!*

Richard Butler Glaenzer

A Question of Temptation

HOW SIR ROGER HERING'S WIFE SPENT THE MOST MEMORABLE CHRISTMAS EVE IN HER LIFE

By the Baroness Orczy

AFTER Roger had gone, Marion Hering stayed on for awhile in the smoking room, curled up in a comfortable chair, just enjoying life. How happy she was! How wonderfully, wonderfully happy! There was a delicious feeling of warmth in her heart—of gratitude to Providence, which had given her everything that a woman could wish for.

With her pretty round chin resting in her hand, Marion stared into the fire and thought and thought how happy she was. She had a lovely home, plenty of money, and Roger—dear, darling Roger, the kindest husband that any woman ever had. Her twenty-three years of married life had been nothing but bliss. Now Roger had come into the title, and Tom was engaged to Kate Culford, the only daughter of a millionaire father, and the prettiest débutante of last season.

Marion's heart felt warmer still when she thought of her boy, so handsome, so attractive, and so popular. He had passed out of Sandhurst quite creditably, and had got his commission in the Guards. Such a dear, lovable creature he was! The only trouble was that he was rather hot-headed, and inclined to be quarrelsome. Sometimes his father was angry with him because of that, but he was very young, and time would sober him quickly enough; and in the meanwhile what a dear boy he was!

Yes, God had been good, very good, to Marion Hering. All Roger's people were so nice—such perfect dears! Old Lady Hering was a delightful mother-in-law, though rather inclined to think that the Herings were on a higher earthly plane than the rest of humanity. Then there was Lucy Furniss, Roger's sister, whose boy Denver had just passed brilliantly for the diplomatic service—a nice, clever boy!

It was a pity that Denver and Tom got on so badly together. Even as children they were like two cats; and then Tom went to Eton and Denver to Harrow, and that settled it. After that the two boys couldn't meet without quarreling. It was a great pity, when they were first cousins, each of them the only child of idolizing parents.

Of course, Tom was by far the more attractive of the two. Denver was rather bookish, and quiet. He wore glasses, and didn't dance. Girls didn't take much to him, but they all adored Tom.

By the way, Tom wasn't in yet. He and Kate Culford had gone to tea with old Lady Hering. Denver Furniss would be there, too. Marion and Roger had been asked, of course, but Roger preferred to go to his club, and Marion had a big Christmas Eve dinner party to-night, to celebrate Tom's engagement; so she had elected to stay at home, as she had still a lot to do.

Now everything was done. She had given a last look to her dinner table and to the drawing-room decorations, and then she settled down for a lazy half hour, curled up in a big chair and warming her toes.

She was very tired, and must presently have dozed off. What woke her was Richardson's voice in the hall, saying in his firm, dignified manner:

"I will see, madam, if her ladyship will see you. What name shall I say?"

Then a voice that was only too familiar broke in peremptorily:

"Oh, I know Lady Hering will see me. Is she in there?"

The next moment the door was thrown open, and Edith came in. Edith! Great Heavens, how dared she come here, unasked and unwelcome? And on Christmas Eve!

Marion had sworn to herself that she would never have Edith Ottley inside her house again.

The visitor dismissed Richardson with a smile, and closed the door, while Marion remained almost paralyzed, sitting straight up in her chair and staring at her sister as if she were an apparition.

Edith came forward rather diffidently. She took off her gloves and dropped them, with her hand bag, on the nearest table. Then she sat down by the fire and held her hands to the blaze for a moment or two; after which she said meekly:

"Won't you say anything to me, Marion?"

This brought Marion back to consciousness of the situation.

"You had no right to come here, Edith," she said harshly. "You know Roger wouldn't like it, and Tom might be in at any moment."

"Would they think I had polluted this house by walking into it?" the other woman returned, looking up at her sister with eyes that had obviously cried their fill. "It is Christmas Eve, you know," she added softly.

"I know all that," Lady Hering said coldly. "What has Christmas Eve to do with your coming here?"

"Only the idea of peace and good will, Marion. We used to be such chums! I thought that perhaps—"

"Did you think that I had forgotten?"

"Not forgotten," Edith Ottley rejoined meekly; "but I thought that you might have forgiven."

Lady Hering gave a harsh laugh.

"Forgive!" she exclaimed with a shrug.

"Forgive the disgrace that you brought on us all! On poor mother, who has gone to live abroad, because she could no longer bear to meet people who knew about that miserable business! On me, who have had to put a brave face on it, and to endure the sympathy of friends and the sneers of those who envied me my position and my happy life! Forgive, when Tom's engagement to Kate Culford was so bitterly opposed by her parents, just because his mother was the sister of the Mrs. Ottley who got six months' hard for stealing her friend's pearl necklace! Forgive, indeed!"

Marion Hering did not scream this out at her sister. She spoke in a low tone, but her voice, though scarcely above a whisper, was hard and trenchant like a lash striking

the other woman in the face. Edith Ottley did not wince. Perhaps she was used to taunts, objurgations, and reproaches. Nor did she weep, for probably the well of her tears had run dry by now. She only said very gently:

"I know, dear! I know all that! Don't you suppose I have thought about all that miserable business until my brain has begun to reel, and I have wondered if I was going mad? But what's the use," she went on, with a weary little sigh, "of telling you all this? You can't understand. You have never known what temptation means—"

"The temptation to steal?" Marion broke in dryly. "No, thank God I never could know that! I would sooner starve!"

"I dare say you would, dear—on principle. We were both of us brought up on high principles, but you were beautiful, and I was not. You attracted a rich man who worshiped you; I, a poor man who deserted me. You were able to give your boy Tom the finest education in the world; I had to send Jim to a cheap school abroad, where he made undesirable acquaintances. For you the path of life was made of soft green lawns and roses; for me it was all thorns and stony—oh, so stony!"

Marion had listened in silence, scarcely moving, a frown on her face, and a scarcely perceptible curl of contempt around her pretty mouth.

"That's all very well, my dear," she said; "but you were not so poor as all that. You had your five hundred a year from uncle's will, the same as I had."

"Five hundred a year!" cried Edith, with a shrug. "Five hundred, with Jim to educate and to start in the world!"

"Enough, anyhow, to keep you from stealing," the other retorted roughly.

"Yes, enough!" the poor woman mused, staring into the fire, in which perhaps she saw visions of herself in the past—a merry child playing with her sister, her début in society, her wedding, and then—

"Yes!" she reiterated dreamily. "Enough until temptation came—real temptation. I was staying with the Waldrons, in Buckinghamshire, for Christmas. Jim came down for three or four days. He was living with a friend in a small flat in London, you know, and was doing quite well as cashier at a small branch of the London and Putney Bank. The friend was false and cruel and dishonest, and Jim was weak. We can't all of us be strong. They

got into bad company. There was gambling, they had payments to meet, and there was bank money lying there ready to hand. Just before that terrible Christmas, Jim found his accounts short by three thousand pounds, and settling day close at hand. He came down to the Waldrons' more mad than sane. At first he would say nothing, but of course I could see that there was something terribly wrong. Then, at last, the day after Christmas, he confessed everything to me, and implored me to find the money. Within the next three days his defalcations were bound to come to light, and there would be nothing for him but suicide. Find the money? Heavens above, how could I? All I had in the world was my annuity, and no hope that the trustees would think of advancing me a penny on it. Three thousand pounds, and Jim talking of suicide! I wired to you, do you remember? You sent me two hundred pounds—which was very kind, but quite inadequate. You said that you couldn't ask Roger for any more, unless I told him exactly what I wanted the money for. How could I tell him that Jim was a thief? My God, what an evening it was! The Waldrons had a big dinner party, and I had to smirk and smile, to jabber and pretend, and all the while I could see Jim's white, set face, at one time looking so haggard that Janet Waldron asked him if he was ill. After dinner, when the ladies filed through into the drawing-room, I had such a splitting headache that I went up to my room to get some aspirin. You know the Waldrons' house—it has a long corridor on the first floor, at the top of the stairs, with the bedrooms opening out to right and left. Janet's own room was at the end of the corridor, and mine quite close to it. I could not find my bottle of aspirin, so, as I had seen a light through the half open door of Janet's room, I went to see if her maid was there and would give me what I wanted. The light was full on in the room, but the maid was not there—neither in the bedroom, nor in Lord Waldron's dressing room, nor in the bathroom. A careless girl, apparently! I went up to the dressing table to look for the aspirin, for I knew Janet wouldn't mind; and there, lying on the tray, was her pearl necklace—one that Lord Waldron had given her for her birthday a month or two before. It had cost six thousand pounds, so he told me at the time. How terribly, desperately

careless of the maid, I thought! In fact, I made up my mind that I would speak to Janet about her. It was really putting a premium on robbery. A necklace, so easily picked up, so easily converted into money! Why did some women have such things, I reflected, trifles worth six thousand pounds, when a fine boy like my Jim would perhaps put an end to his life for want of half that sum?"

Edith Ottley paused for a moment, but her sister did not speak, and presently she resumed her pitiful story.

"All of a sudden the horrible temptation came upon me to slip the necklace into my pocket—the necklace which would mean salvation for Jim. I would be doing no one any great wrong, I thought, for Janet had so much jewelry that she would never miss these pearls, and Lord Waldron was so rich that he could easily buy her more. It was awful, horrible, mean, and contemptible, I know; but framed in by the string of pearls I could see Jim's haggard face, and his hand holding a revolver, already raised for the fatal shot. There was no one about, no one had seen me come up. I sneaked back into my room with the necklace in my pocket. Chance favored me all through. Janet did not discover the loss of her necklace until about a week later, when she wanted to put it on. Then there was a hue and cry after it, of course; but in the meanwhile I had slipped across to Paris and sold the pearls there for three thousand pounds. I gave Jim the money, and his defalcations were never discovered. I thought myself safe. It would be useless, I suppose, to tell you that I never knew a moment's peace after that awful night. Probably you wouldn't believe me; but it is true that my life became a hell. I don't know whether it was remorse, or conscience, or shame. All I know is that even Jim's affection and gratitude were positive torture. Of course, he did not know what I had done. Like most young people, he just took things for granted. He was saved, that's all he knew, and I will do him the justice to say that from the day after that awful Christmas he became steadier than I had ever known him. He cut himself away from bad acquaintances. He stuck to his work and earned praise from his employers, and, incidentally, a rise in his salary."

Again Edith paused, breathless with the emotion which memory of that terrible time

had brought forth. Marion had scarcely moved. She sat opposite her sister, with lips tightly pressed together, her head resting against her hand, staring into the fire. Her face expressed neither sympathy nor impatience. She listened, and that was all.

After a minute or two Edith went on speaking, in a voice veiled with suppressed tears:

"And then discovery came. The Waldrons had employed a very clever detective, who traced the pearls to the jeweler in Paris, and he in turn remembered me. Lord Waldron was pitiless. Men are like that, sometimes, when they don't understand. You were pitiless, too, Marion, though you are my sister and might have understood. I wonder now how it is that shame didn't kill me. It very nearly did, and I spent the best part of the six months in a prison hospital. The nurses were very sorry for me. You were not sorry, Marion—only bitterly resentful; but in my heart I always forgave your harshness. You had never known trouble, and how could you understand?"

II

EDITH OTTLEY had long ceased speaking. She was leaning back in her chair, with her head against the cushions, but her eyes were dry. They had long since shed their last tear.

Lady Hering gave the fire a poke. Then she, too, leaned back in her chair, her shapely hands toying with the beautiful jade necklace that Roger had given her for her last birthday. After awhile she said:

"I don't know, Edith, why you should think me so hard. What could I do? When that awful disgrace came on us all, I had to take mother abroad. Then Roger joined us, and wouldn't let me come back to England until you—you were out of prison. You talk so much about your Jim; what about Tom? It did make a difference to him, you know. At one time we thought that it would be useless for him to get into the Guards, for his life there would be made a misery to him, because of you. The Culfords were very unpleasant, too. It was all horribly difficult, and very hard on Tom, you must admit. Fortunately Colonel St. Laurie is an old friend of Roger's, and has been wonderfully kind about Tom; and Kate Culford is so deeply in love that she simply talked her people over.

Tom is engaged to her now, and he got his commission; but when I think how near the brink we were, how near to seeing all Tom's future prospects in life dashed because of you, you cannot wonder that I don't feel very kindly toward you."

"Not even at Christmas time, Marion?" the sister pleaded gently.

"Oh, that's all cant, Edith!" Lady Hering returned coldly. "You didn't think of Christmas when you stole Janet Waldron's necklace."

"No!" Edith murmured. "I only thought of Jim."

"But Jim is all right, surely? Nothing about him came out in your affair."

"No—I was too careful for that. I never gave them the slightest chance of probing into my motives. To all intents and purposes I stole the necklace for my own personal gain, and Jim has been able to retain his position in the bank."

There was silence again between the two sisters. Edith, with hands clasped, was staring into the fire. Lady Hering tapped her exquisitely shod foot on the floor with obvious impatience. She hoped that Edith would go away before Roger and Tom came home, and she was cudgeling her brain for a phrase that would not sound too harsh.

"Well, Edith!" she said at last, with a weary sigh, and moved as if to rise from her chair.

Mrs. Ottley looked up at her, but did not respond immediately to the obvious hint.

"Well," she said dully, "I suppose you have been wondering why I came to-day, after keeping away from you all this while."

"I confess," replied Marion, "that I didn't imagine you had come here just to wish me a merry Christmas."

Oh, why didn't Edith go? There was the sound of Roger's latchkey in the door, and a moment or two later his voice asking Richardson whether her ladyship had gone up to dress. Richardson replied that her ladyship was engaged in the smoking room with a visitor. It was too annoying! Roger might come into the room at any moment.

"I wish you would tell me what you do want," she said, unable to control her nerves any longer.

"Only this," Edith replied resolutely. "Jim finds his position at the bank rather unpleasant at times—because of me, of course. He and I want to go away from

England—to start a new life where no one knows our history—”

“Well?”

“Roger has those rubber estates still, hasn’t he?”

“He has; but if you are going to ask him—”

“I can’t ask him, Marion, but if you would put in a word for Jim—”

“No, I can’t put in a word for Jim,” Marion interrupted almost roughly, “and I won’t. Roger and I never mention your name now, and I don’t want to begin. When I married a rich man, I made up my mind that my family should never be a drag on him.”

“But, Marion dear—”

“No, I won’t, Edith, and that’s flat! All I want is to let the whole of my family sink into oblivion, so far as Roger or Tom or any of the Herings are concerned. It isn’t as if you hadn’t enough money to live on. You still have your five hundred a year—”

“I am paying Janet Waldron three hundred a year out of my income, until I have paid off the price of that necklace.”

“Well!” said Lady Hering, with an indifferent shrug. “That’s only fair, of course, though it seems rather mean of Janet to take the money; and even so, you have enough to live on, and Jim has his job. Let him stick to it!”

“If you knew how Jim and I long to be out of England—”

“I dare say you do. Then why don’t you go out to Australia, or Canada, or somewhere? You couldn’t starve with your regular income, and Jim would find some sort of a job presently.”

“That would be taking a terrible risk, Marion. It would be throwing up a certainty for what is only problematical; but if Roger would give Jim a chance—”

“You can ask him, if you like,” Marion said decisively. “I won’t.”

“Marion dear! For the sake of old times! Think of your Tom—”

“I forbid you,” Marion broke in harshly, “to drag Tom’s name into your miserable affairs. Thank God, Tom is an upright and honorable gentleman. I won’t have him mixed up with your Jim in any way.”

“I am not trying to do that, dear,” Edith rejoined meekly. “I only meant—”

“Never mind what you meant. I’m not going to revive all those unpleasant memo-

ries by talking about you or Jim to Roger. Besides—”

She paused, frowning and biting her lip. Even her selfish heart was smitten with compunction for what she had been about to say; but Mrs. Ottley apparently guessed. She raised horror-filled eyes to her sister.

“You mean,” she said, “that you think Jim might—”

Then she gave a moan and buried her face in her hands.

“All right, Edith,” Marion murmured. “I didn’t really mean that.”

But already the unfortunate woman had regained control of her nerves. Rising resolutely from her chair, with quick, spasmodic gestures she readjusted her hat and picked up her gloves and her hand bag.

“I am sorry I troubled you, Marion,” she said coldly. “I won’t do it again, I promise you.”

She walked firmly to the door. Lady Hering mechanically touched the bell. She did not attempt to detain her sister, or to bid her a warmer adieu. She was only conscious of a feeling of intense relief that this unpleasant interview was over at last. In her mind she was rehearsing the phrase with which she would warn Richardson never to introduce this particular visitor if she called again.

Edith did not say another word. She walked out of the room with as much dignity as she could command. In truth, she was humiliated beyond endurance. Mother love had fought a desperate battle against pride, before this interview had come about. Pride had been vanquished, and lay in the dust, smirched beyond relief.

III

WHEN the front door had finally closed on the unwelcome visitor, Marion Hering felt as if she had awakened from a bad dream. She could scarcely realize that Edith had actually had the impertinence to call, that she had sat there, by the fire, warming her hands, and had asked her—Marion—to speak to Roger about that young blackguard Jim Ottley—a boy who according to his mother’s own showing had robbed his employers to the tune of three thousand pounds.

They were a pair of them, those two. Edith’s story was all very well. She might have stolen Janet Waldron’s necklace in order to save Jim from prison, but Marion

put no trust in her. If she would steal, she would lie about it to excuse herself. What impertinence, to enter her sister's house after spending six months in prison like a common thief! Indeed, Edith actually was a common thief—just as bad as some wretched charwoman who stole half a crown to buy her man an extra good dinner for Christmas.

Horrible!

Well, thank goodness, that was over! Edith Ottley would surely never darken these doors again; and now it was time to dress. Roger must be wondering who the tiresome visitor was; and Tom—Tom was very late! He would hardly have time to dress.

Suddenly Marion heard Tom's voice in the hall, saying to Richardson:

"Has mother gone up to dress yet?"

It was Tom's voice, but it sounded so strange that Marion—

But she had no time to reflect on this, for the next moment the door was thrown open, and Tom came in. He came in and immediately closed the door behind him, and then stood with his back to it, staring at his mother.

"Tom!" Marion exclaimed. "What in the world has happened? What is it?"

Tom looked almost as if he had gone out of his mind. His hair was disheveled, his face haggard, his eyes staring before him as if into something appalling. His lips were quivering. He couldn't speak.

Lady Hering went up to him, took him by the shoulders, and shook him.

"Tom, in Heaven's name, aren't you going to speak? What is it? What is it?"

After awhile she caught a murmur that came through his trembling lips:

"Denver! Denver! Oh, my God!"

Lady Hering frowned, anxious, puzzled, vaguely terrified.

"Denver?" she asked. "What about Denver?"

With a groan, Tom staggered to the nearest chair, and, burying his face in his hands, murmured hoarsely:

"I've killed him!"

"Tom!"

Marion, wide-eyed, dry-lipped, stared at the boy, not because she believed what he had just told her, but because she thought that something had unhinged his brain. She knelt down beside him.

"Tom," she said as quietly as she could, stroking his hair and cooing softly, as only

a mother can, "pull yourself together. Something has upset you. What is it? Shall I get you something to drink? No? Well, then, just try to tell me quietly what has upset you."

He raised his head and looked at his mother. His eyes were sane enough. It was not that—not that, that sent an icy shiver down Marion Hering's spine, and made her heart feel as if it had been turned to stone. No, it was not fear for Tom's sanity that gave her that sudden sense of nameless horror—it was the conviction that the boy was speaking the truth, and that something awful, stupendous, devastating, had really, really happened.

She rose from her knees, went to the door, and opened it, to see if any one was in the hall—some one might be listening! Then she went back to Tom and drew a low chair close beside his. He was sitting all huddled up, with his two hands hanging over the arm of the chair. His hair was disheveled, and in his eyes there was nothing but dull despair.

Lady Hering took hold of his hands, and gently stroked them up and down. She couldn't speak for a moment or two, because her mouth felt dry and gritty, but after awhile she contrived to murmur:

"Tell me, Tom!"

He did not reply at once, so she had to help him out with questions.

"Tell me what happened. You quarreled with Denver? Where?"

Tom nodded, and his voice came to her ears like a hoarse, broken whisper:

"I walked with him after tea to his flat—he said he had something very important to say to me—it was about Kate. He said that she—she had cared for him until I came—that she had promised him—sworn—and then—"

"Never mind what Denver said," Marion broke in firmly. "You were angry with him for something he said about Kate. Then what happened?"

"I knocked him down."

"Well? And?"

"He went down all of a heap—I think his foot slipped—he fell down—oh, my God!"

Tom would have buried his face in his hands, only that his mother clung to his hands. She saw the look of horror that dwelt so persistently in his eyes. She felt the shuddering and shrinking in his body; but she still had to learn what it was that

Tom saw again now, in retrospect—what it was that had filled his soul with horror.

"He fell down?" she questioned peremptorily. "Did you notice at once that he was badly hurt?"

"Not at first," the boy replied with a shiver. "I was too angry, at first, to look at him; but suddenly the room seemed so still, so—so silent! Then I looked at Denver. He lay full length on the floor, with his head against the fender. One arm was outstretched, and his fingers were all outspread. They looked—they looked—awful! I called to him, but he didn't move. His face slowly became a sort of gray color, just like ashes in a grate, and blood was trickling from the corner of his mouth; and then his jaw dropped. I can't tell you how terrible he looked—and so still! Everything in the room was so still, and so dreadfully, dreadfully cold! I knelt down beside him, and with my handkerchief I wiped the blood from his mouth. Then I got some water and sprinkled it over his face. I took hold of his hand. It was cold—cold as ice—and not a breath came through his lips. Suddenly I understood that he was dead. Something seemed to whisper it to me:

"He is dead! You have killed him!"

"I felt just like Cain, mother. I had killed Denver, who was almost my brother. I felt horribly, horribly afraid—afraid of that silent, motionless body—afraid of the shadows—of the draft that blew one of the blinds out and in. I was afraid, mother darling, and, like a coward, I just ran out of the room—all the way—like a coward—oh, my God!"

For a long, long while Lady Hering didn't speak. She just sat beside the boy on the arm of his chair, took hold of his head, and pillowed it against her breast. With gentle hands she smoothed his hair, and stroked his cheeks, while great, dry sobs shook the athletic youth's frame. She was thinking—thinking hard.

"Listen, Tom!" she said, after awhile. "Listen!" she repeated more peremptorily, and forced him to look up at her. "You are not sure—you cannot be sure that he—that Denver is dead. He may have hit his head against the fender, and just lost consciousness."

Tom shook his head vigorously.

"If you had seen him, mother!" he murmured. "His jaw dropping—his hands—oh, God, it is I who killed him!"

"Be quiet, Tom!" she commanded. "Be quiet! Let me think a moment. Did you call any one after—after it happened?"

"No—I was too big a coward even for that. There was no one in the flat. I ought to have called, but there was no one about."

"No one? You are sure?"

"Quite sure. I saw no one, or I should have told them. You know Denver's flat—there's never any one about—there's no hall porter—"

"Did any one see you come to the flat with Denver?"

"No—no one saw us. The front door was open, and Denver's flat is on the ground floor. He let himself in with his latchkey. I remember thinking how lonely the place looked, and the streets were so dark and deserted. Every one was holiday making, I suppose."

"Did you tell any one at Lady Hering's that you were going to walk with Denver to his flat?"

"No. He hadn't been to Lady Hering's. I met him just outside the park, when I was walking home."

"Where was Kate?"

"I had just put her in a taxi. She wanted to get home to dress."

"Then no one saw you go to the flat?"

"No one."

"Or knew you were going?"

"Or knew I was going."

"You met no one coming out?"

"Not a soul."

Lady Hering said nothing more for the moment. She sat beating her hands together and thinking—thinking hard.

There was Denver, of course. He might not be dead, but merely unconscious, and in need of help—of immediate help. A doctor, quickly called, might save him, if he were only badly hurt.

On the other hand, if Denver was dead, there was Tom! A doctor, hastily summoned, would ask questions—would want to know. A quarrel! An accident! A fall! Would people believe in an accident? Every one knew that Tom and Denver were bad friends. Every one knew that Tom was hot-headed.

And this business about Kate Culford. People knew that she had flirted a good deal with Denver. When that miserable scandal about Edith occurred, many thought that she would throw Tom over and marry Denver. Her parents urged it

—they didn't like the idea of Tom's connection with that Mrs. Ottley, who had been in prison for stealing Lady Waldron's pearls. People knew about all that. Would they believe in an accident, or even in a quarrel ending with—with manslaughter? Oh, the horrible word!

If Denver was dead, it would mean all that and more. Whereas, if one just kept quiet—

"Listen, Tom," she said at last. "You must pull yourself together. We can't help the dead, but we've got to think of ourselves—of you, of me, of father—"

Tom gave a heart-rending groan.

"Heavens, mother," he cried, "I hadn't thought of that!"

"But you must, dear! You must! And you must understand that the one thing you and I have got to do is to keep quiet about the whole thing. You understand?"

Tom looked at her. For the first time since he had come into the room, Marion Hering saw a glimmer of hope creeping into the boy's eyes.

"You understand?" she reiterated.

Tom nodded.

"I think I do," he said.

His voice sounded clearer now, and eager. He was only a boy, after all; and trouble has a way of falling away from the shoulders of young people, especially if a mother is there to help bear the burden. There was no sense of guilt in Tom—of horror, yes, but not of guilt. Denver had said what he shouldn't about Kate, and Tom had knocked him down. It was horrible that he should have killed him; but it was a horrible accident, not a crime.

Anyway, Lady Hering thought that the best thing to do was to keep quiet about it all, and Tom was not likely to talk—no fear! All unconscious that keeping quiet might mean death to his cousin, if Denver was only badly hurt, he was only too ready to fall in with his mother's plans.

First of all there was Richardson. Had Richardson appeared astonished to see Tom looking so disheveled? No—the hall was rather dark. Tom didn't think that Richardson had noticed anything. He was probably thinking about the table for the dinner party.

Well, then, it was just a question of seeing the thing through, of not allowing any one to guess that anything was wrong—not even father, or Kate—least of all, Kate! Oh, Tom thought he could go

through with it all right. He felt so much better—so very much better—already. Mother was such a dear, and so wise! Tom kissed her more tenderly than he had done for years.

"You don't know how I felt, mother darling," he said, "until I told you all about it!"

Then, just shamefacedly, he drew his stained handkerchief from his pocket.

"I had better burn this, hadn't I?" he said.

Together, they watched the handkerchief till it was burned to a cinder. Then they decided that it was time to go up and dress.

"Don't be afraid, mother," was the last thing that Tom said, before they parted outside his bedroom door. "I'll see the thing through, all right!"

IV

WHENEVER Lady Hering looked back on that Christmas Eve dinner party—and she did so very often—she always wondered that something did not snap inside her brain during that evening. The amazing thing was that no one seemed to notice that anything was amiss—not even Roger.

When she went up to dress, he remarked casually that she was late, and just before she went downstairs he said in his usual kind, gentle fashion:

"You look worried, darling. Is there anything wrong?"

When she told him that she had had an altercation with the cook, he smiled and appeared satisfied.

Denver Furniss, of course, was to have been of the party, and Lady Hering made pretense to wait for him for five minutes after all her guests had assembled and the dinner hour had struck. Sir Roger, however, declared laughingly that young men must learn to be punctual, and that perhaps the F. O. had sent Denver off on some secret mission that involved the welfare of the British Empire. Anyway, he, for one, was hungry, and he didn't want to see a good dinner spoiled for any young diplomat in embryo.

It was just after that that the most terrible moment of this awful evening occurred. Lady Hering rang the bell and told Richardson that she wouldn't wait for Mr. Furniss. There was a general din of laughter and chattering in the room—Tom being as gay as any one, full of fun, and seemingly absolutely care-free. What a

wonderful thing youth was, thought Marion Hering!

She herself was in such an agony of mind and body that she felt as if she could not endure the strain any longer, as if she had wandered into the farthest recesses of hell, and, having come back to a hideous earth, must suddenly scream, or rave, or fall dying on the floor—like Denver—like that poor boy Denver!

Suddenly, with half an ear, she heard Kate Culford say something about a hat. Kate had bought a new hat, or something—anyhow, she mentioned a hat. From those recesses of hell into which poor Marion Hering was ceaselessly wandering to-night, an unseen voice whispered:

"When Tom came in, he had no hat."

Had he left his hat in Denver's flat? If so, that hat would be a damning witness against him—all the more damning because she and he had kept quiet about the whole thing.

Marion looked across the room to where Tom was laughing and teasing Kate, and joking with two or three other young people as merry and irresponsible as himself. Heavens above! That hat! At all costs, Marion had to make sure.

How she walked across the room she never knew. It had ceased to be her drawing-room—it was a court of law. Her guests were not in evening dress—they were all in black, and had come there to watch Tom, who stood in the dock; and away up there, where the judge sat, there was a hat—Tom's hat, the proof that he had been in Denver's flat just before Denver was killed.

But she did contrive to go across the room; and, when Roger spoke to her, she gave him quite a merry smile. In the morning room, downstairs, there was a cupboard where Roger and Tom kept their hats and coats. Tom's hat—the one he had worn this afternoon when he went to old Lady Hering's—was not there.

Perhaps Richardson had taken it upstairs. Richardson, at this moment, was in the dining room, giving a last look at the table before serving dinner. Lady Hering wondered if she would have the strength to call to him—to speak at all. Her throat felt as if it was in a grip that choked her. Her whole body shook as with ague, and yet her head and hands felt on fire. Hell? Indeed it was a worse hell than Dante ever dreamed of!

Then, suddenly, the telephone bell rang. The instrument stood on the desk in the morning room. As the bell continued to ring, Lady Hering stared at it as she would at a snake that fascinated her before devouring her. Her eyes dilated, her lips parted, but no cry came from her throat. She almost ceased to live.

Richardson's brisk step dragged her out of this trance. He looked comically astonished when he saw her ladyship standing there, near the cupboard door.

"That's all right, Richardson," she contrived to say, quite naturally. "I expect it's from Mr. Furniss. I hope he isn't ill."

Richardson withdrew. With a firm step Marion went up to the telephone. Her hand was quite steady when she took the receiver down and held it to her ear.

"Lady Hering?" said a brisk, pleasant voice.

"Speaking," she replied firmly.

"Oh, Lady Hering!" the brisk voice went on. "I am Dr. Hudson. I am speaking from Mr. Furniss's flat."

"Yes?"

"He has had a nasty fall—struck his head against a fender, and there is a slight concussion. Lucky his man came in when he did—found him lying on the floor unconscious, and telephoned for me—yes, very lucky—if he had been left lying there much longer, I don't know what—no, no—no cause for alarm now—he will be all right—but it will take a little time, and what we must have is absolute quiet. No, no—don't think of coming here—he wouldn't know you, and I am sending in a competent nurse for the night. His man can do all that is necessary in the daytime. Yes, that will be best—I'll be with him at ten o'clock to-morrow morning, and if you will come round then—good night, Lady Hering—I thought it best to telephone to you, as Mr. and Mrs. Furniss are abroad. That's quite all right—so glad I was in time. Yes, very lucky—good night!"

The brisk voice said nothing more, and Marion Hering hung up the receiver. From the drawing-room upstairs came the buzz of conversation and laughter, and Tom's voice, gayer and louder than any.

Then it was that Marion felt as if something in her brain would snap. Life came back to her, but with such a rush that she felt giddy and sick and frightened by this sudden burst of hope and joy after her immeasurable despair. What she longed to

do was to kneel down and thank God for this heaven-born relief. She longed to fall down on her knees and cry, or laugh, or scream. The reaction was well-nigh as unendurable as the strain had been.

"Shall I serve dinner now, my lady?"

It was Richardson's matter-of-fact appearance, his voice, his manner, that recalled her to herself, to the necessities and conventions of life, and helped her to master the hysterical outburst that threatened her. She gave the necessary orders, and then went, calmly smiling, back to the drawing-room. All through the evening she smiled and chatted, and no one noticed that anything was amiss. This was Christmas Eve, and Tom's engagement to Kate Culford was being celebrated, and nothing happened to mar the harmony, the merriment of the evening.

"Good old Denver! I am glad he's all right! What a fright the beggar gave us, eh, mother?"

That was what Tom said when Marion told him about the telephone message. She had done it tentatively, afraid that in the excess of his emotion at this sudden relief he might betray himself, just as she very nearly betrayed herself before Richardson; but two minutes later Tom was as gay and lively as ever. What a wonderful thing

youth was! Irresponsible — unthinking — wonderful!

When everybody had gone, and before she turned in for the night, Marion Hering sat down at her desk and wrote to her sister Edith:

The young people will be out all the afternoon, and Roger and I will be alone. Will you come to tea and bring Jim along? We'll talk over old times and Jim's prospects for the future. I am sure Roger will find him a good appointment in the East Indies or Australia. Anyway, we'll talk it all over. I feel sure that there are happy times in store for you yet. Don't worry, dear, and don't be angry with me. I did seem hard this afternoon, I know; but somehow—now—I understand many things which I did not understand before. You shall have a happy Christmas, dear—I promise you that.

She would send the note over by hand in the morning. Oh, yes—she understood many things now! She understood what temptation meant to a woman when her boy's life and honor were at stake. Poor Edith had only stolen a few pearls, but she, Marion, had been willing to let poor Denver Furniss die, untended and alone, rather than that Tom should suffer for his actions.

It was Christmas morning, and the message had gone forth to the people of this earth to love, to forgive, and to understand.

PROMISE

High on my wind-wild hill, at daybreak of dim December,
Fronting magic moon-silvered pennons of haze I stood;
Misty afar, vague lakes' outbrooded, and at my shoulder
Dark loomed the wood.

Silence of man; no sound, save this wood world's own making;
Chill roar of wind surf, streaming through mountain's naked trees;
Roister of rain-gorged brook, swift drumming flush of partridge—
Silence, save these.

Pale ghosts and slim, white birches' fluted columns rising;
Slashed penitential pines, where russet the needles lay;
Moss, fern, shy lichen peeping, up through dusted patches,
Greeted new day.

Dying the world was, sodden with leaves outworn, old sorrows;
No flower could burgeon there, nor any bird might sing;
Yet, fresh conceived, new buds by myriad swayed, proclaiming
Another spring.

Spirit of spring exultant, promise revealed unconquered,
Buds, how ye danced for gladness, vibrant with life athrill!
Mocking wan winter's shroud, dead leaves' supreme surrender,
High on my wind-wild hill!

George Allan England

The Bronze Slippers

JEAN MARTEAU, OF THE HÔTEL BEAU SOLEIL, RECALLS A
STRANGE ROMANCE OF THE EARLIER DAYS
OF MONTE CARLO

By Rida Johnson Young

JEAN MARTEAU was polishing a pair of small bronze slippers in his little cubby-hole of a room in the Hôtel Beau Soleil, which is perched far up on the side of a hill overlooking Monte Carlo.

There were boots and shoes of all descriptions placed in orderly rows, two and two, on the floor beside him. Back of him, upon the wall, hung coats and trousers—immaculate, rich-looking coats and trousers, waiting to be pressed, though they were scarcely in need of attention. It was the way of the guests at the Beau Soleil. They seemed to exist only to keep Jean at work. The shoes they placed outside of their doors each night were seldom marred with more than a light coat of dust. Rich people stayed there—people who went about in motors, scarcely putting their feet to the ground.

Times had changed from the old days, Jean was thinking. He could well remember the time when first François Blanc, the adventurous ex-waiter, had secured a gambling concession from Prince Charles of Monaco. The Beau Soleil had not been in existence then, but Jean, a tall, handsome youth of nineteen or thereabouts, had been general utility man for M. Levin, who at that time kept a small inn in the Condamine. He had remained with the Levins through their rise to fortune, which had come rapidly with the growth of Monte Carlo. Now he served M. Levin's son, who was the proprietor of the Beau Soleil and a rich man to boot, having large holdings in real estate in the principality.

Jean was an old man now—a tall old man, with a powerful frame and heavy shoulders which had begun to droop a little; but his eyes were childlike, and as blue as the waters of the Mediterranean on a cloudy

day. Once they had sparkled as brightly blue as those waters under sunshine, but the years had misted and softened them.

Perhaps there are people living to-day who can remember the handsome boy at the Auberge Levin. Though Jean had not known it, he had been rather noted in those days. His had been the supreme of physical beauty.

"Like a Greek god!" the women exclaimed when they saw him.

As a matter of fact, there was nothing Greek nor godlike in Jean's handsome, but none too keenly intelligent countenance. He was just a superlatively fine animal, full of the joy of life. He would sing at his work in a fine resonant barytone. People used to stop in the hot dust of the road to listen. Women looked at him with hungry eyes. He was supremely unconscious of this, being absorbed and happy in his duties.

When the crowds began to come in the wake of François Blanc, M. Levin had added a wing to the inn, and had promoted Jean from man of all work to *commissionnaire*. He sent to Paris for a blue and gold livery, and Jean stood at the door, resplendent, though a trifle put out at having so little to do. Pulling down boxes from the tops of traveling coaches, opening and shutting the door, keeping the hall tidy and the great fire going, carrying letters or boxes of flowers or sweets to the guests upstairs—poor provender for the greedy energy bottled up in his powerful frame!

These were no tasks at which he could sing. Only very early in the morning, when he was attending the tiny garden in front of the inn, did the song well up in his throat; and then he must keep his voice low, for fear of disturbing the guests. However,

he was not unhappy. It was not in his nature to be so. Life seemed good to him in whatever aspect.

Jean was thinking of those old days now, as he sat there polishing the bronze slippers. There was something about those little slippers which recalled Jean's one romance. Not that he definitely recognized it as a romance. The whole thing had always remained a puzzle to Jean—a pleasing puzzle, with a hint of mystery in it. A bit of pain, too, hung about that memory of long ago.

The little bronze slippers! What had they to do with it, Jean wondered?

Click! Something opened up in his mind—her slippers had been bronze, too! They were the first things he had seen about her, as she had stepped daintily out of the high-swung coach.

Her bronze slippers were not like these with high-pointed heels. They had been quite flat, and tied across the instep with ribbons. A crinoline had swung concealingly over them. Girls didn't wear their skirts to their knees in those days. Jean thought the old styles better.

He dangled the bronze slipper on his great forefinger and leaned forward, not thinking, but carried back into the old times as if he were living them again. The following chapters will tell what he saw and heard, together with some other things which he did not see and hear, but which belong to the story.

II

A TALL man with an enormous winged collar, bound by a many-folded cravat, stepped from a coach. He wore a high beaver hat, which augmented his somewhat pompous manner.

"Is this the Auberge Levin?" he inquired of Jean, in execrable French.

"Yes, *monsieur*, at your service," replied Jean briskly.

"We are here, Sarah," said the tall man, speaking into the coach. "I don't think much of it, but you may as well get out. They say it's the best place here—the only place where you can get decent food!"

He extended his hand, and a very haughty lady, swathed in a traveling cloak, which stretched sparsely over her enormous crinoline, accepted the hand and descended. She looked at the door and all over the front of the inn, with her nose in the air, as if the whole place smelled disagreeably.

"I told you we shouldn't have come," she said. "We should have stayed comfortably at Cannes. You could have transacted your business with M. Blanc from there just as well. He should have come to you, anyway!"

"I've heard all that before, Sarah," said the man, in a patiently exasperated tone; "but I'm not buying any pig in a poke. I want to see the thing for myself."

The lady sniffed disdainfully and passed through the door, which Jean held open, with no mitigation of the expression on her countenance, which plainly said:

"It's dreadful! I told you so!"

Then an incredibly small bronze slipper was thrust from the coach, and another one followed, and a very lovely young girl stood in the roadway, staring at Jean.

M. Levin came from within, rubbing his hands and smiling ingratiatingly, bowing the tall gentleman and his lovely daughter into the inn.

The girl looked back at Jean. He wondered why she stared. He looked himself over, and brushed a speck from his new blue and gold livery. Then he hastened to lift the three cowhide trunks and the many parcels and hat boxes from the top of the coach.

"Look, mamma!" said the girl, drawing the haughty lady toward the open door. "Did you see that young man? Look!"

"What about him? Why should I see that young man?" snapped the woman.

"He's so handsome!" said the girl. "I've never seen any one so handsome!"

"I'm surprised at you, Lily!" reproved the woman. "One should never notice the personal appearance of menials!"

"But he's really quite extraordinary, mamma," protested the girl. "Any one would notice him!"

"Well, my daughter should not!" said the woman imperatively.

She drew the girl away to the chimney corner, where they waited for the tall man, who had gone into the bar with M. Levin. It was the custom of the host to offer a welcoming glass of wine to his guests before assigning their rooms.

A little later, as Jean went up the stairs with a trunk lightly poised upon his powerful shoulders—for the *auberge* had no porter in those days—he encountered M. Levin coming down. He could see that his master was very much pleased and excited by the arrival of the new guests.

"Do your utmost to please, Jean," he said. "It is M. Clarke, the American millionaire. There will be good *pourboire*—you can count on that!"

Jean hated tips. He was only half French, anyway. He had his wages and his keep, and he disliked coins flung at him as a favor.

"I always do my best," he said—a trifle surlily, for him.

"Naturally! Naturally!" agreed M. Levin. "But it means much to the house. That *sacré* Hôtel de Paris has not as yet so distinguished a guest!"

He referred to the small hotel managed by Mme. François Blanc, where the majority of the fortune and pleasure seekers stayed, because of its proximity to the Casino.

M. Levin went down the stairs smiling, and rubbing his hands to such an extent that one might have thought it would hurt him.

Jean went up with the trunk. He carried it easily, holding himself straight and seeming to put forth no effort. He was very strong, and a trifle vain of his strength.

The Clarkes had the best suite, in the new wing. There were two bedrooms, heavy with carved oak, and a salon filled with gilt furniture fresh from Paris.

This suite was the most pretentious in the principality. Privately, M. Levin thought there was nothing so grand even at the palace, where the scant furnishing was old and almost crumbling into pieces. It was rumored, however, that the prince had started renovations with the bonus that M. Blanc had given him for the gambling concession. He was a big shareholder, too, in the Casino company. If things went on as they had been going, there was little doubt that the prince would soon be a wealthy man.

The lovely young lady opened the door to Jean's knock. In a sweet, lisping, baby-talk French she instructed him as to the placing of the various trunks and boxes. She followed him about, being very explicit in her orders—which were, in truth, not orders, but something more like soft, hesitating requests for valued service.

Mr. Clarke seemed pleased to see his daughter making herself so useful.

"Well, Lily!" he said, looking into her room from the door of his chamber. "That's right! If you'd always help out and see to things like this, perhaps your

mother would stop talking so much about a courier or valet, and all that nonsense!"

Mrs. Clarke's voice came promptly, though a trifle indistinctly, from the next room. She was relieving her head of the burden of its enormous chignon, and had hairpins in her mouth; but the subject of a personal servant was one upon which she was always fluent, however handicapped at the moment.

"People of our means always travel with a valet and a maid, or at least a courier," she said. "It makes us cheap over here, doing things for ourselves as we do. It isn't as if you couldn't afford it."

"I'm not going to put on airs to please these foreigners!" said Mr. Clarke decidedly, turning from the door and addressing his wife with the exasperation that he felt at having started the subject. "When I can't button my boots or tie my stock, I'll be ready for an old man's home!"

"Well, you might think of Lily and me! Every woman in my position has a personal maid. I've been covered with confusion time and time again when I've had to ask assistance from hotel maids. We'll never get anywhere socially if we keep on acting as if we were paupers!"

"Oh!" said Mr. Clarke, running his fingers through his hair desperately, as he sank into a chair by the open window. "I'm sorry I started the subject. Get a maid, if you want to, and have her snooping around under our heels day and night; but I won't have any smirking man around me, trying to pull on my pants, not if every damned duke in Europe looks down his nose at me!"

"William!" exclaimed Mrs. Clarke, taking the hairpins from her mouth, in order to give full voice to her horror. "You promised you wouldn't use any more of that vulgar profanity!"

Their voices ran on and on.

In Lily's room Jean was upon his knees, struggling with the lock of a little cow-hide trunk. The American girl hung over him solicitously.

"It can't be the right key, *mademoiselle*," said Jean, rising at length. "I've tried it every way, but it won't turn."

Lily looked at him with large, innocent eyes.

"Oh, can it be the wrong one?" she exclaimed. "Dear me!" She looked at it closely. "Yes—it's the key to my mother's trunk. Oh, I'm so sorry—such a foolish

mistake! And keeping you from your duties so long!"

"That is nothing," said Jean. "I am here for that."

"To be kept from your duties?" she asked, with a little fluttering laugh.

"No—I mean to serve the guests," he replied soberly, reaching for a key which she had fished from the foolish little reticule that hung from her waist ribbon.

"You don't look like a—er—porter," said Lily.

As she gave him the key, their fingers touched, and they both blushed youthfully.

"Pardon, *mademoiselle*!" said Jean, not knowing why he was apologizing.

He bent quickly over the trunk, unlocked it, and pulled the straps from their buckles.

"Is that all?" he asked.

"Yes, I think so."

She put out her hand for the key, but Jean, demonstrating the adage of the burned child, laid it quickly upon the table.

As Jean went out and closed the door of the room, he encountered Marthe, the *femme de chambre*, in the little hall. She was a buxom, red-cheeked girl, with whom Jean sometimes walked in the evenings. She was older than Jean, but had determined to marry him. There was a sort of understanding between them that when his wages were raised, and he was a little older, he would speak to her definitely about it.

"They require much attention, these American millionaires!" said Marthe, with a flirt of her skirts. "Quite twenty minutes they kept you in there, fetching and carrying! If they are so rich, why do they not bring their own servants?"

"That's their affair, I suppose," replied Jean soberly, wondering what had made Marthe so angry.

He could not know that she had been peeping through the keyhole, and had seen how the pretty American girl had hung about her big, handsome Jean. She had seen other women look at him so, and had laughed, but somehow this seemed no laughing matter. The girl was so young—no older than Jean—and so lovely! What a handsome pair they had made, standing there and looking at each other!

Marthe's eyes flashed all sorts of threats and deep determinations as she went down the hall, swinging her skirts prodigiously.

Jean shrugged. The moods and varying emotions of women were beyond him!

Jean was very busy that day. M. Blanc and several other very important men came to the *auberge* to see Mr. Clarke. They had a long conference in the ordinary. Jean had to help with the drinks, for the bar man had gone home with a colic, and, though M. Levin would pour and mix, he felt it beneath his dignity to serve.

Jean did not listen intentionally, but he could not avoid gathering from the conversation that Mr. Clarke had come there to look into the proposition of becoming a shareholder in the Casino enterprise. M. Blanc had poured thousands into the venture, but he needed outside capital to carry out his ambitious schemes for making Monte Carlo a world-famous resort. He wanted a loan, but the American shrewdly insisted upon being made a shareholder.

Jean did not approve of gambling. It seemed a foolish thing to him to throw away hard-earned money on a turn of the roulette wheel; but he approved of the Casino. Already it had brought prosperity to that once poverty-ridden principality. There was no telling but that he himself might grow rich through it some day—not by play, of course; but if he saved carefully he might be able to buy a piece of land there, and have an inn of his own. Stranger things had happened!

III

JEAN MARTEAU was an early riser. He liked the quiet hours when he could see the Mediterranean turn from gray to purple, and then to blue, with soft, rosy reflections here and there from the pink clouds hanging over the mountains.

There was a little garden in front of the house, which was his special care. At day-break he could always be found there, weeding and spading and clipping and singing softly under his breath. It was a small space, and as neat as a pin. Sometimes Jean could not find enough work there to keep him occupied until he heard the whistle of the bar man coming to work, or the careful movements of Marthe and the cook, opening up the back of the house with great caution, so as not to disturb the guests; but he always gave that hour to the garden and to long, long looks out over the sea.

When people were up and about, it was different. Then he would fly hastily to his sweeping and polishing within.

On the morning following the arrival of

the Americans, Jean was feeling particularly happy. He sang with fervor at his work—perhaps a little more loudly than was discreet, for he heard the latticed blind click in a window over his head, and felt that some one was peering out at him. He rose from his stooping posture and looked up.

The house was low, and Jean was tall, so that his blue eyes were not far below the soft brown ones which looked directly down, deep into them. His heart gave a terrific thump. He groped for words of apology for having seen her there in the soft white robe; but she was gone before he could collect his wits—gone without a nod or a smile, just that one deep, long look, which somehow seemed to remain in the air, hypnotically holding Jean's gaze to the window.

After a few moments he returned to his work, but he sang no more that morning. He had a conscious feeling, as if some one were listening.

He saw her once more that day. He held the door open as she went out for a drive with her father and mother in Mme. Blanc's beautiful victoria with its handsome black horses, which was the show turn-out of the whole principality.

It greatly augmented the importance of the Americans in the eyes of the *auberge* that Mme. Blanc had sent her own carriage for their pleasure. That little ex-servant girl was ruling things in Monte Carlo with a high hand, and conducting herself as if she were a queen; and the people submissively took her at her own valuation.

Lily Clarke did not look at Jean as she followed her father and mother to the waiting carriage. She did not even raise her eyes, but Jean was uncomfortably conscious of her consciousness of him. He felt oddly thrilled and abashed, and stood staring after the carriage until it disappeared at a bend of the road. Perhaps, he thought, she had not spoken to him because she was angry at him for having looked up at her window that morning.

All that afternoon and evening he kept thinking uneasily about the young American girl. The next morning, too, she was in his thoughts so vividly that he was scarcely surprised when suddenly he saw her there in the garden beside him.

The bright star over Mont Agel was still showing in the paling sky. It was on the edge of dawn.

"I couldn't sleep," she said. "I thought

I'd come down. Do you mind if I stay here while you work?"

"No—oh, no!" stammered Jean.

She went to the little white bench under the mimosa and sat there. The powdery scent of the blossoms was very faint in the chill of the dawn. At the first touch of the sun it would be stronger. It would float down upon her, surrounding her in an atmosphere of intoxicating sweetness.

Jean stooped very low, and remained so for a long time, grubbing for imaginary weeds. He felt that she was looking at him, but he would not straighten up, though the blood was throbbing in his too long lowered head. He dared not look at her. This was very strange, for Jean had never been afraid of the gaze of a woman before. Always he had been able to meet them eye to eye in his boyish, impersonal way.

"I think I'm going to be very lonely here," said Lily, at length.

She spoke very softly, her voice veiled and mysterious as the dawn.

"Why, *mademoiselle*?" asked Jean.

He arose with great relief, and, taking his clippers, gave meticulous attention to a climbing rose by the door.

"My father and mother go to the Casino every evening. They were there last night, and I don't know at what hour they returned. They think I am too young to go."

"They are right," said Jean. "It is no place for you."

"Why not? My mother says it is very fashionable."

"Fashion is all very well," said Jean, "but it is no place for a young girl."

"I'm not so very young," answered Lily. "I'm almost eighteen. How old are you?"

"Twenty," lied Jean, adding a few months.

"How did you happen—I mean—why are you working here?"

"Because I like it. Why shouldn't I work here?"

"Well, you don't look like—you look like one of those Russian noblemen, and I thought that perhaps you had lost all your money gambling at the Casino and had had to—"

"I? Gamble? I don't approve of it! Besides, none of the residents are allowed in the rooms."

"But my father gambles, so it can't be wrong. He says he likes to take a chance on things. He won a gold mine in California on a throw of dice."

"Well," said Jean, "I wouldn't touch it—not for anything."

"I like strong, determined men," said Lily, looking at Jean admiringly.

A beam of the rising sun suddenly made the garden appear to be swimming in a golden haze. The two young people floated in it toward each other—not physically, for they did not stir, but it seemed to them that they were standing there close together in a new-born world.

Jean, with an effort, tore his eyes away from her.

"The sea!" he said, with a sweep of his arm. "It's wonderful in the morning, with all those colors. I look at it often."

"It's lovely," assented Lily. "It was blue on the maps at school, but I never knew, until we came here, how blue it can really be. What makes it so?"

"I don't know," said Jean. "Where I came from there was sea, too, but it was mostly gray, and sometimes green."

"Where do you come from?" asked Lily.

"I come from Pointe de Penmarche. That's in the north."

"I suppose your people were rich, and lost their money, and that's why you came so far away to work, so that no one would know!"

"No—I have no kinsfolk. M. Levin got me from the orphan asylum."

Lily was silent for a moment, evidently engaged in a slightly dismayed readjustment of ideas.

"Oh!" she said at length, in the tone of one who has solved a problem. "Probably your parents were aristocrats. You may have been lost when you were small, and—"

"My father was drowned at sea when I was a little fellow. He was a fisherman," said Jean simply. "Then my mother died, too, and they sent me to the asylum. I didn't like it there. I was glad when they sent me to M. Levin."

Lily tried not to appear disillusioned. She tried not to feel disillusioned, but she had been thinking all sorts of romantic thoughts about this handsome young man, and—well, this was rather a let-down.

"I think perhaps I'd better go in," she said. "Mother may wake and wonder where I am."

"Perhaps you had better, *mademoiselle*."

When she had gone, Jean looked about the garden rather vaguely. The golden haze was gone. Clouds were beginning to hang low upon the mountains, and there

was a sudden chill in the air. Jean felt unaccountably depressed. It looked as if it was going to rain.

IV

As the days went on, it was plain to be seen that William Clarke and his socially ambitious wife had found in Monte Carlo an absorbing opportunity for the exercise of their talents and the furtherance of their desires. Mrs. Clarke was mingling with a glittering horde of titled adventurers and declassed but noted women. A duke had chatted affably with her. He was a very much impoverished duke, and would have chatted affably with any one who was reputed to have so much money; but Mrs. Clarke did not know that.

Royalty itself had brushed her skirts one night in the *salle privée*, and had begged her pardon with a gracious bow. She and her husband had dined with the Prince of Monaco himself, in his gloomy castle high up on the rock overlooking the sea. Above all, she now had a maid—a smart Frenchwoman who knew all the tricks of the toilette, and who, besides, was supposed to companion Lily and to improve her French during the long evenings when she was left alone at the inn.

This was all most gratifying to the ex-school-teacher who had captured a new-made millionaire in the height of the gold rush in California, and who had been so bitterly disappointed to find that with all her millions she could make no headway with the socially elect in New York. Her husband had built a palace there, on the wrong side of town—a palace in which she had sat in lonely state, waiting for callers who never came. The big silver card tray in the hall had collected nothing but dust.

In Monte Carlo, Clarke was in his element. He had struck a boom town. During the day, real estate absorbed him. He was buying right and left. It was said that he was going to build a villa on Cap Martin, which would be a villa only in name, and a palace in reality.

At night, far into the small hours, he could indulge his passion for gambling. He played lavishly and spectacularly, placing huge stakes with great *sang-froid*. He considered inwardly that he "had 'em whichever way the cat jumped," being a shareholder in the Casino.

Clarice, the smart maid, fulfilled her duties to her mistress in a most satisfying

manner, and there were few women in the rooms at night better turned out than the wife of the famous American millionaire. Her companioning of Lily, however, left much to be desired. She was deeply absorbed in an affair with a croupier who lodged at a baker's in the Condamine, not far from the Auberge Levin. He was a day croupier, and his evenings were free. His hobby consisted of paddling around and around in a rickety old boat in the little harbor under Monaco; and Clarice floated around and around with him.

This left Lily's evenings as free as the croupier's, but with no hobby to fill them. She used to sit in the long, soft twilights under the mimosa in the little garden. She could see the front door from there, and Jean opening and shutting it. He looked enormously tall in the faint gleam of the candles within. Sometimes his shadow would spread on the path, elongating, reaching almost to her feet.

When the dark came, she could hear low voices and soft laughter from the road outside—the voices and the laughter of happy lovers lingering by the sea wall. It made her feel very lonely.

Sometimes, when Jean was relieved from his duties, she would see him come with Marthe from around the side of the house. They would join the other strollers in the Condamine, and then Lily felt more lonely still.

It did not debase Jean in her mind to see him walking with a servant girl. In spite of the fisher father and the orphan asylum, which she had put away in an inactive corner of her brain, she felt sure that he was a reduced gentleman, who chose menial tasks and menial companionship in a spirit of scorn and bravado, showing the world that he did not care.

She would weave marvelous fancies, sitting there in the dark, of discovering Jean's real parentage. She saw herself riding with him to the ruined castle of his ancestors, which her father would restore by the power of great wealth. She saw no further than that—just the restoring of his birthright, and being there on the spot to give it to him herself; and then—oh, some unimaginable and unimaginable bliss!

Jean felt very sorry for the lonely little American girl. He told Marthe so one night.

"And why should you feel sorry for her?" asked Marthe tartly. "She has

everything! If we had the one-thousandth part of the money she has, we could get married and set up a place of our own!"

"Money isn't everything," said Jean, feeling privately glad that he had not the means to marry and set up a place of his own with Marthe.

He felt a trifle indignant, too. Marthe was always saying things like this, as if everything were settled between them. A girl should allow a man to do his own talking on matters of this kind! He was not so sure he ever wanted to marry.

He gave a sidelong look at the girl walking beside him. Her full skirts were too short. They displayed very thick ankles. How ridiculous she would appear in little bronze slippers with silken ribbons over the instep!

"I shall ask her to walk with us one night," said Jean.

"You'll get your trouble for your pains!" snapped Marthe. "She wouldn't come. She thinks herself miles above us!"

"I shall ask her, nevertheless," Jean insisted stoutly. "If she will not come, then I shall not think she is so lonely sitting there by herself."

"I shan't go along, if you do!" declared Marthe.

"Oh, yes, you will," said Jean. "She would not go otherwise."

So one night Jean respectfully approached the little figure sitting under the mimosa and proffered a walk along the Condamine up toward the Casino, where they could see the gay throng milling about between the Hôtel de Paris and the gambling house. His heart seemed to have risen to the top of his chest and to be fluttering there, and his voice trembled, but he managed to get the words out.

Lily assented at once.

"I'd love it!" she said. "I've been tempted to go by myself, but I didn't dare. I'll fetch a wrap."

"I'll get Marthe," he said.

"Marthe?"

"She will be with us, of course. I think your mother would prefer that Marthe should be with us."

"Oh, yes—of course!"

Lily ran into the house to fetch her wrap, and Jean proceeded to the kitchen, where he found Marthe in angry tears. She wouldn't walk with that little American minx, she said, not if the world were to topple about her ears! Jean should not

walk with her, either. She'd tell M. Levin. She'd tell Mr. Clarke. She'd tell the world, in fact, that Jean was after the little fool's millions.

"You're being a fool yourself, Marthe," said Jean soberly. "There's no question of anything like that. Why, she's as far above me as Mont Agel! You ought to be ashamed to say such things."

But Marthe wasn't ashamed. She said many more things, until the placid Jean began to feel angry, and went away in a huff.

Lily was waiting in the garden. She had a fleecy scarf about her head. Her eyes were shining and eager in the light of the moon. Jean told her that he thought they'd better not go for a walk, because Marthe would not come.

Lily looked very much dashed for a moment, but quickly decided that they could sit on the garden seat and talk; and in the end they found that quite as satisfactory as a walk.

This was the beginning of many evenings spent there in the garden. Having once started, Jean felt bound to continue. Of course, he knew he ought to do something to placate Marthe, who went about the house like a threatening thundercloud; but his duty seemed just as clear in relation to Lily, who confessed that she had been lonely to desperation until he had taken pity upon her.

Jean was not a talkative person. It satisfied him to sit there and hear the soft voice telling him about the great country overseas and the life there. It satisfied him, also, when they sat in silence sometimes, breathing all the delicious scents from the garden, watching the stars, and hearing the soft sound of love and laughter on the road outside. They could hear the sea swish on the rocks beyond the sea wall.

There was little life about the *auberge* after nine at night. The proprietor retired early, and all the guests went to the Casino. Few returned before two or three o'clock in the morning. There were long, long hours that Jean and Lily spent together.

No one knew they were there in the garden except Marthe, who used to creep into one of the guest rooms upstairs and listen to the murmur of their voices. They spoke low, and, even if she had heard, she would have found nothing in their conversation to enrage her; but she was enraged by her imagination. She fancied them sitting

there, hand in hand. Sometimes she thought that Jean's arm might be encircling the other girl's slight form. She could not see them clearly. From where she watched, they were just a blur of white and black.

As a matter of fact, Jean usually sat quite uncomfortably on the extreme edge of the bench. He would not have dreamed of placing so much as a finger upon the edge of the American girl's wide-spreading skirt. He was enthralled by the sweet face always turned to him in the gloom, spellbound by the low voice that came to him through the darkness. He never felt the slightest impulse to touch her. She was something too precious, too high—like a condescending princess, he thought.

He didn't know what it was that held him there night after night, contented, after a long day of subconscious waiting. He was very dense, poor Jean—dense about his own emotions and the emotions of others.

V

ONE night Lily told Jean a disturbing piece of news. She was very much agitated by it. She wanted his advice.

"My mother has met the Duc de Froisard," she said. "He's a very young duke, and very poor. Mother is going to give him a dinner at the Hôtel de Paris, and I'm to be there. I think she means that I am to marry him; but I won't!"

"Why?" asked Jean, feeling a strange upswelling of pain in his heart.

"Because I don't love him!"

"Well," said Jean, "if your parents arrange it, what can you do? Surely a young girl cannot choose her own husband!"

"You want me to marry him?" exclaimed Lily accusingly.

"I—*mademoiselle*! I? What have I to do with it?" stammered Jean.

Lily was silent for a moment. Jean ached to say something comforting, something that she apparently wanted him to say—he didn't know just what.

"But we are friends, aren't we?" asked Lily at length, in a small voice. "You wouldn't want to see me unhappy?"

"No, *mademoiselle*—no!" said Jean stoutly; "but what makes you think your mother wants you to marry him?"

"She's ordered me new gowns from Paris, and—and I heard father say that probably it would cost a lot of money to buy a duke, but he was game if she had set her heart on it."

"Well, of course, a girl must obey her parents in such things. If they say she must, she must."

"Oh!" Lily, usually so meek, sprang up and stamped her foot. "Oh, I think you're cruel—heartless!"

She ran away into the house, leaving Jean dismayed and astonished. Here was his wonderful soft-voiced princess behaving just like Marthe! Women were difficult to understand!

Jean spent a miserable two days, for on the following evening Lily sulked in her room and did not come into the garden. He hung about there until ten o'clock, looking up at her window. He had a vague idea of calling up to her, but he felt that would be presumptuous.

When he reluctantly went inside, he found Marthe waiting for him at the bottom of the stairs. She grinned at him maliciously. For want of something better to say, he asked her if she would like to take a walk.

At that Marthe went into a rage, saying that she was taking nobody's leavings. She supposed he had gone too far with that little hussy, and had been put in his place; and for her part she was glad of it!

Jean retreated again into the night, away from the angry, incomprehensible tirade. How strange he felt, how unhappy! He could not remember ever having felt like this before.

All the next day he went about with a frown upon his face. He was morose and surly—quite unlike himself.

That evening, at twilight, Lily was there in the garden again, seated under the mimosa, which had lost all its blossoms and no longer smelled sweet. Jean finished his nightly tasks as quickly as he could, and joined her there. He came toward her slowly and hesitatingly, not knowing what sort of a reception to expect. There was a moon, and he was relieved to see by its light that there was a soft, deprecating smile upon her face.

"I'm sorry I was angry," she said. "I thought you were so unsympathetic!"

"I cannot say things as I feel them, *mademoiselle*," replied Jean. "I was sorry for what you told me, but I did not see how it could be helped."

"Well, anyway, I didn't tell you all that was making me so unhappy—I mean the *real* reason why I don't want to marry this duke."

"Oh!"

"It isn't only that I don't love him, but that I *do* love some one else."

Her voice was very, very low and trembling, as if from fright.

Jean trembled, too. This was terrible—much worse than hearing that she was to be married. She loved some one!

"Who is it?" he asked, and his tone sounded almost savage.

"It's—some one I met here," answered Lily, and now her tone was so low that Jean had to come very close to hear.

Some one she had met there in Monte Carlo! Jean's slow mind went over the possibilities. Could it be the riding master who came each day, looking so handsome, mounted on a great black horse and leading the little brown mare upon which he lifted Lily so lightly and easily, as if she were a feather blown there by the wind? Jean had never liked the way in which the man had put his great hand under the girl's little foot.

Perhaps it was a young American, the son of another millionaire, who had called several times and had tea with Lily and her mother in their salon; or it might be some one whom Jean had never seen—some one whom she had met on one of those long afternoon drives with her father and mother.

He was silent so long, thinking confusedly and staring at her, that the girl gave a tremulous, abashed little laugh, and looked away.

"Is it that riding master?" he stammered. "He is no good. He has no business to touch your foot. I could mount you as well as he, and better. I am much stronger than he!"

Lily was quite composed now, and smiling. This was as it should be—Jean was jealous.

"Oh, no!" she said in a teasing tone. "It is not the riding master. Can't you guess, Jean? I'll give you three guesses!"

They were so absorbed that they did not notice the sound of rapidly approaching horses' hoofs or hear the rumble and thump of wheels on the execrable road outside. They were quite unconscious of anything but themselves as they awaited the momentous words that were to be spoken in the next moment.

It was not until Mr. Clarke sprang into the garden with a great "Ah, ha!" like an ogre in a fairy tale, that they awoke to

the world outside themselves. Mrs. Clarke quickly followed her husband. She was panting as if she herself had been drawing the carriage in which they had come. She took Lily by the arm, without a word, and pushed her through the door and up the stairs to their rooms. The girl was too terror-stricken and confused by the look of rage upon her mother's face to question or protest.

Clarke thrust his fist under Jean's nose.

"You'd dare, would you? You'd dare?"

Jean, who was no coward, nevertheless retreated before the fury in the man's face.

Clarke ran into the inn, calling loudly for M. Levin.

Jean lingered by the door. In a few moments he saw his master appear at the top of the stairs in slippers and nightcap. The proprietor of the *auberge* had pulled a pair of trousers over his shirt, the tails of which he was agitatedly thrusting into them as he descended.

Clarke now thrust his fist under M. Levin's nose. That good man blinked. He had been aroused from sleep, and looked as if he could not collect his wits. The American took him by the arm and drew him—or, rather, dragged him—into the ordinary. He banged the door after them, but Jean could hear his raucous voice uttering dire threats of vengeance.

Meanwhile Lily was confronting her mother, who stood with an open sheet of note paper in her hand, towering over the frightened girl like a Juggernaut prepared to crush its victim.

"So it is true!" she said. "What this vile letter says is true!"

"What? I don't understand—"

"That you have been conducting a vile affair with this menial—that you have spent hours each night with him in the garden—that my daughter has so demeaned herself as to allow a servant to make love to her!"

"No, mother, no! He has never said a word of love to me, though I love him very, very dearly!"

"Oh! Oh!" The Juggernaut tottered. "You dare to say this to my face?"

"But Jean has never said a word to me," went on Lily, brave in the defense of her lover. "I wanted him to, but he never did. He does not even know that he loves me."

Mrs. Clarke collapsed upon the bed and went into hysterics. Strangely calm, Lily brought smelling salts and a glass of water. She even patted her mother upon the shoulder,

as if the agitated woman was an unreasonable child who needed reassuring.

Mrs. Clarke recovered quickly. She sat up upon the bed and looked at Lily with stern, accusing eyes.

"You don't seem to understand," she said. "Your father was handed an anonymous letter in the cloakroom at the Casino—a letter insinuating all manner of vile things against you, his daughter; and you stand there handing me a glass of water as cool as a cucumber! What are you made of? Have you no shame?"

"I've done nothing to be ashamed of, mother," said Lily. "I didn't see any harm in sitting in the garden with Jean. After all, if he ever asks me, I am going to marry him, and—"

Mrs. Clarke's whoops of distress reached Jean's ears as he stood in the garden. He had half a mind to go up and see what was the matter; but while he hesitated he saw Mr. Clarke and M. Levin run across the hall and up the stairs. Presently the cries ceased, and Jean went in and up to his own room under the eaves. He did not go to bed at once. He sat for a long time by his little scrap of a window, thinking.

Of course they were angry to find their daughter in the garden with him, but they didn't understand. They didn't know how lonely she had been. It seemed to him that they were making an utterly unnecessary fuss about it. He wondered what it was that Lily had been going to tell him just before they had come and interrupted.

It hurt him to think that she loved some one, but he wanted her to be happy. He hoped they wouldn't force her to marry against her inclinations. He wished, vaguely, that he were other than he was. He wished he were a person of importance and authority—some one who might step in and see that his princess was not despoiled of her right to happiness. He wanted her to be happy, above all things.

For the first time in his life Jean indulged a daydream. He saw himself tall, commanding, princely, a god stepping in and arranging the cogs of the machine so that Lily Clarke might ride comfortably to her happiness.

VI

THE next day Jean had a certain apprehensive feeling about facing his employer, for he felt sure that M. Levin would vent the important guest's anger upon his head;

but during the morning he saw nothing of the proprietor, and things seemed to run their usual course about the inn.

Marthe was often in the front hall, however, with a certain satisfied, malicious poise in her every movement and gesture. Jean knew that she was observing him closely, and listening, too, to sounds and voices from upstairs; but he maintained an impassive front as he waited for something to happen—something which he felt sure would be disagreeable.

He was not surprised when he received an unusual summons, about noon—an order to attend M. Levin in the proprietor's own room. He was surprised, however, to see an affable and ingratiating smile upon his employer's face, and to be graciously invited to take a seat for a little talk which M. Levin wished to have with him.

Jean refused the seat. He had been too well trained to sit in the presence of his master. He stood with his hat in his hand, looking rather like a handsome, unimpressible rock awaiting the futile beating of the sea.

"Now, Jean, I have very good news for you," began M. Levin surprisingly. "You have been with me here at the *auberge* for some time, and have performed your duties excellently. I have decided to raise your wages."

"Thank you, *monsieur*," said Jean.

"You shall have just twice the amount you are getting now—on one condition."

"*Monsieur* is too good!"

"I want to see you settled, Jean. I like my employees to feel themselves men with responsibilities. I want to see you married, Jean. I want you to marry Marthe."

"But I do not wish to marry Marthe," said Jean. "She has a very bad temper."

M. Levin flushed. One could see that he was being pleasant under restraint.

"But it has always been understood. You have given her to understand that you would marry her when your wages were raised."

"It was she who gave me to understand that," said Jean.

"But you agreed. You have walked with her. You have compromised her. You will make her a laughing stock to the others. You must be a man. You must do the right thing!"

"Marthe has scarcely spoken to me for a month. I am sure she no longer wishes to marry me."

"You are wrong. I have talked with her. She is eating her heart out for you, and is ready to marry you whenever you say—to-day, for that matter."

"I'm sorry, then, but I won't do it!"

M. Levin lost his temper, and raved. He accused Jean of robbing him of his best patrons. The Clarkes were going to move. They were packing now. They were going to that *sacré* Hôtel de Paris. Mr. Clarke would move heaven and earth to ruin him, M. Levin. The only thing which would placate him was that Jean should marry, and marry at once. That fool girl! That would get the nonsense out of her head!

He went on, giving the game away to Jean, who only dimly gathered its moves and countermoves.

"Mr. Clarke is mistaken," he said in a bewildered tone. "It is nothing to Mlle. Clarke if I marry or do not marry. Who am I that she should think of me in that way? Besides, she loves some one else."

"What? What?"

M. Levin started up from his chair.

"She told me so," said Jean. "She told me so herself!"

M. Levin reached the door in one bound. He ran out and down the corridor to the Clarkes' suite, where he banged loudly upon the door.

Jean waited awhile, thinking that his employer would come back; but M. Levin did not reappear, so after ten minutes or so Jean returned to his place by the door.

Later in the day he was sent to the wine seller's at Beau Soleil, astride of a little donkey, with great panniers on its sides, in which he was to bring back some dozens of bottles of new wine. When he came back, it was twilight. The stable boy handed him a little slip of paper which looked as if it had been torn from the wrapping of a parcel.

"She give it to me herself—the young lady. She gave me ten francs, too, and no one but you was to see this. They went, bag and baggage, to the Hôtel de Paris. She said I was to tell you."

Jean looked at the little scrap of paper. On it was written in a trembling hand:

Whatever they say or do, Jean, I am still your friend; and I will not marry the duke.

Jean folded the piece of paper and soberly stowed it away in his pocket. He kept it there for many and many a long

day, though it grew worn from his taking it out and reading it so often.

There was a dull ache in Jean's breast as he went about his accustomed tasks, at which he sang no more. The nights were very lonely and vacant. M. Levin scarcely spoke to him. One could see that he was under the ban of his employer's displeasure.

Marthe, on the other hand, grew strangely sympathetic and sweet. She seemed very much changed. Jean fell into the habit of walking with her again in the evenings, and she behaved like a good comrade. She never referred, as she used, to the subject of marriage. She was quite a comfort to him in his dull, inexplicable misery.

At the Hôtel de Paris, meanwhile, they were having a difficult time with Lily. She was growing thin and pale, and would take no interest in her dress or appearance. The dinner to the young Duc de Froissard was a dismal fiasco. Lily was wordless and aloof. In spite of her beauty, she made a very bad impression upon the duke. He thought her sulky, and too thin.

However, her father's millions were attractive, and the duke was very poor. He sent for his mother, the duchess, and for his lawyer, and told them to open negotiations with the Clarkes. He stipulated that the bride's *dot* must be worthy of the immense sacrifice he was willing to make for the restoration of his family's grandeur.

However silent in public, Lily was eloquent in private to her father and mother. Day after day she repeated that she would marry Jean and no other. Day after day she flung into their shocked faces the fact that she loved him. Night after night she flouted the duke, the duchess, and all of their kind. Something had to be done.

In spite of her protests, the betrothal was announced. The news flew over the principality and was communicated to Jean by Marthe.

Jean was very much disturbed. It seemed a fitting marriage for his little princess, but—well, he hoped she would be happy.

Lily flatly denied the engagement to any and every one who would listen. The thing was creating much talk, almost a scandal.

Mr. Clarke sent for M. Levin and had a long talk with him, in consequence of which Jean was again summoned to his master's private room.

"Jean," said M. Levin soberly, coming

directly to the point, "you have found a very powerful friend. I am not at liberty to mention his name; but he is offering a very substantial *dot* for Marthe if you will marry her at once."

"But why? Why should any one do this?" asked Jean. "Oh! If it is M. Clarke, I will not take his money!"

"I did not say it was M. Clarke," snapped Levin; "but you will accept the money and marry Marthe, or you may take your notice, and we'll see how soon you'll find a place, leaving here in disgrace and without a reference!"

This was a serious matter. The inn was Jean's life, his home, his pride. This needed thinking over.

He told M. Levin that he would consider the matter; and the innkeeper gave him twenty-four hours in which to make up his mind.

All day Jean found it very difficult to concentrate upon the subject. There was something at the back of his mind which made him reluctant to come to a decision.

To marry Marthe was the sensible thing to do, of course. There was no sense in throwing up all his prospects because of some inward feeling of resentment at the compulsion put upon him. Just a few months ago he had not shied in this unaccountable manner at the idea that some day he would marry Marthe. He had never been enthusiastic about it, it is true, but somehow he had taken it as a matter of course. Marthe had anticipated it, and it was a very suitable match in every way; but there was something now which held him back.

He had not made up his mind when the evening came and he saw Marthe lingering about, waiting to be asked to walk.

They went out together and leaned upon the wall overlooking the sea. Marthe was unusually silent. Jean glanced sidewise at her. Her ruddy face was softened under the light of the moon, but it was too broad. It was not oval and delicately pointed, like—like some faces.

There was a faint odor of the kitchen—a moist, milky odor—about Marthe. No faint breath of orris and violets came to him when she stirred, such as he remembered mingling with the scent of the mimosa there in the garden.

He wondered if the young duke was somewhere in this enchanted evening with his betrothed. Jean hoped that his prin-

cess was not going to be too unhappy, forced into a marriage in that way!

"What are you thinking of, Jean?" asked Marthe softly.

"I was thinking of *mademoiselle*," replied Jean, truthfully but untactfully.

Marthe's face flushed, and she turned away, biting her lips to keep back angry words.

"I was hoping she'd be happy," Jean went on. "She's such a little, frail thing!"

"I saw her yesterday in a carriage with her mother and the duke. She looked very happy," said Marthe, cutting the lie out of whole cloth.

Well, that was that!

Just before they went back to the inn, Jean asked Marthe to marry him. She consented, not too quickly, not too eagerly, but with a becoming maidenly reluctance and assumed surprise.

She raised her face to him in the moonlight, and Jean, seeing what was expected of him, kissed her upon her roughened cheek, which smelled of brown soap.

So it was arranged very quickly and satisfactorily to all parties concerned, except Jean, who felt that M. Levin, who had assumed the position of guardian to him, was rather rushing matters.

He could not know that M. Levin had been promised a handsome recompense for the loss of his important guests when the wedding should have been solemnized and certain details arranged to William Clarke's satisfaction.

VII

It was quite a festive wedding. M. Levin seemed bent upon making it a notable one. There was a big noonday dinner in the ordinary. The proprietor sat smilingly at the head of the table, with Jean and his bride at the foot, and Marthe's many relations and friends grouped about. Jean had no relations to come to his wedding. M. Levin was the nearest approach to one that he could muster.

Carriages waited outside—gay carriages decorated with garlands and ribbons. The wedding party was to enjoy a drive, with the bride and groom in state in the first carriage, for all the town to see, as is the French way.

Jean felt very self-conscious and uncomfortable as he took his place in the open victoria beside his bride, who looked like a peony in a froth of tulle. He was fervent-

ly wishing that he was well out of it. He was regretting that he had married at all. He wished the bright day would darken, and the skies open, and a flood of rain descend upon them—anything rather than to be making a show of himself for the whole town to see.

He wished Marthe wouldn't smirk. She looked foolish, with that schoolgirlish smile. She was a woman, quite old—almost twenty-four.

The wedding party proceeded slowly along the Condamine and up toward the Hôtel de Paris. Every one upon the road waved to the bride and groom, and wished them luck. Children ran along throwing bits of wild flowers from the roadside into the carriage.

As they approached the Hôtel de Paris, Jean could see that there were many people seated there in the sunlight at little tables. Women's spreading skirts were like immense bouquets upon the lawn, and there were gay parasols dotted here and there.

Now they were to be made a show of before all that fashionable throng, thought Jean miserably! Foreigners didn't ride about and make a show of themselves after their weddings. Lily Clarke had once told him that, when she had seen a similar procession pass. At the thought of his little princess a sharp spasm of pain wrenched his heart.

As the carriage drew near, the blur of bright colors upon the lawn resolved itself into people—people with bright, tolerant, amused eyes, smiling at the bride and groom. Jean suddenly saw Lily and her father and mother sitting at the nearest table on the lawn, almost by the roadside.

The blood rushed to his head, and his heart throbbed so violently that he felt Marthe must hear it. Glancing at her, he saw that her head was high, and that there was an odd, malicious, triumphant smile upon her lips. He looked away quickly, almost hating his bride; and as he looked away he found himself looking into the startled eyes of his princess, who had risen from the table and was staring at him with a white face upon which there was an expression of horrified incredulity.

She put out her arms, as if seeking support, and then collapsed upon the lawn. It was as if a white rose had died and dropped its petals softly upon the grass.

Before any one could interfere, Jean sprang from the slow-moving carriage, ran

over to the insensible girl, and took her in his arms.

"How dare you?" Mr. Clarke shouted in futile rage.

Mrs. Clarke pushed at Jean violently, but he paid no attention to either of them. He did not even hear Marthe's scream of rage.

The girl in his arms was as light as a feather. What had they done to her, Jean thought miserably? She was nothing! He carried her into the hotel.

A curious crowd followed them. Mme. Blanc appeared, and the manager and most of the staff, crowding about Jean with his unconscious burden.

He was propelled somehow through the people and up the stairs to a bedroom. Lily did not stir. Jean clasped her more and more closely. He didn't want to give her up to any one.

It was quite a few moments before he could be made to understand that he must place her upon the bed. Held there so close to him, she smelled of violets. He wanted to hold her forever. Mrs. Clarke struck at him with indignant, futile fists.

At length Jean comprehended what was wanted of him, and placed the slight form upon the bed. How small she looked there, scarcely making an impression in the smooth expanse of coverlet!

A physician came, and everybody but Mr. and Mrs. Clarke and Jean was turned out of the room. They tried to thrust Jean out, too, but he was immovable, like a rock. He stood there staring at the white face on the bed, seeing nothing else.

The doctor applied restoratives. Presently there was a faint sigh, and Lily opened her eyes. She saw Jean standing at the foot of the bed in his absurd bridegroomly get-up, with an enormous *boutonnière* on his black coat. He didn't look like the Jean that she remembered. She gazed at him for a moment, while all the others held their breath. One could see that she was remembering. One could see that she knew Jean was married and lost to her.

She turned her head upon the pillow.

"Tell him to go away," she said.

After a few moments they made Jean understand that she wished him to go away.

The wedding carriages were drawn up at a little distance. The bride's relatives were gathered about her carriage. Marthe

was weeping noisily. Jean took his place beside her, and gave the order to drive on.

The relatives scuttled back to their places, and the procession moved. Marthe stifled her sobs. There was a look upon Jean's face that made her afraid, and she uttered no word of recrimination.

A few weeks later a sad tragedy happened in Monte Carlo. On the eve of her wedding with the Duc de Froissard, Lily Clarke, the daughter of the great American millionaire, was drowned—accidentally, it was said; though why she should have been walking on the sea wall in the Condamine so late in the evening, all by herself, was a mystery. Young ladies didn't walk upon sea walls; but then she was a queer, moody girl, every one said.

No one had seen her walking upon the sea wall, but once, when she had seen some urchins perched up there, her mother had heard her say that she would like to do it. Mrs. Clarke repeated this time and time again to every one who would listen.

Yes, it was odd that Lily had walked upon the sea wall, but then she had always wanted to do it, and it must have happened that way, for they found her body upon the rocks, almost in front of the Auberge Levin. She must have slipped in the dark and fallen there. The night tide had covered her and receded, leaving her drowned there in a hollow of the rocks.

VIII

JEAN MARTEAU was thinking of all this as he sat there dangling the bronze slipper upon his great forefinger. Marthe hadn't been such a bad wife, but somehow they had not prospered. Perhaps he had been foolish in refusing the *dot* from the rich American.

Marthe was dead now. Jean did not miss her very much.

He wondered about the man whom Lily Clarke had loved. He wondered if the man, whoever he was, had ever heard—but of course he must have—of her drowning there directly in front of the Auberge Levin. Jean was glad that M. Levin had moved away from that haunted spot, and had built this fine hotel on the mountainside.

He fell to work again, polishing the bronze slipper. It was strange, he thought, how distinctly memories came back to a man in his old age—memories which still had a hurt and a sting in them, in spite of the years between.

Starlight to Drink

HOW DON GILMAN, BOSS OF THE RIVER GANG, GOT RID OF HIS SPRING FEVER

By William Merriam Rouse

THE Doghouse was empty except for old Verney Downs, the proprietor of the hotel, and Don Gilman, boss of the river gang. It was early afternoon, and the men had gone from dinner to their work of easing ten thousand standard of logs past Dunder Falls; but Gilman stayed on, with his shoulders level and broad against the grimy wall and his head bowed. He was doing some heavy thinking.

At any time when the gang was at work, the Doghouse offered an excellent place in which to think. It was the river drivers' retreat—the basement of Downs's hotel, which he had set apart as a lounging, smoking, drinking, and fighting room for those customers who were not tame enough to associate with an occasional drummer, the clerk in the general store, and womenfolk. Verney was firm about this. Anything was all right in the Doghouse, but no fights were allowed upstairs in the office, and gentlemen chewing tobacco must use the cuspidors.

Not only were there stairs within the house, but a flight of stout plank steps ran from the outside door up to the sidewalk. Thus there was safe exit for those who did not care to take part in the arguments which sometimes upset the peace and dignity of the room.

Everything about the Doghouse was solid and enduring. Everything had to be. The floor was scarred and splintered by generations of spiked boots, but it had been put down in the days when good lumber was plentiful, and it would wear until heavy feet tramped their way through it.

Verney's lamps were bracketed as close as possible to the ceiling, and the big cast-iron stove stood upon a homemade foundation of brick. Tradition said that it had never been kicked over in a fight.

It was expected that the stovepipe would come down every time there was a scuffle, just as it was expected that somebody would pay for the broken window glass; but aside from these things all was fast and firm. The benches stood up wonderfully well, and so did the ancient hardwood door.

Barring the village church, a better place for quiet thought could not have been found in Dunder Falls at this time of day. Old Verney was almost like a piece of furniture, unless he had something of importance to say, or somebody spoke to him. He sat on one of the benches, with his hands folded upon his round, fat middle, sucked at a broken clay pipe, and meditated with half closed eyes.

Don Gilman felt that he was practically alone; and he needed to be, for he was wrestling with an unknown something the like of which he had never before encountered. Hitherto life had presented such problems as a log jam to break, a gang to handle, or a fight to be won with boot and fist. He had always solved these problems in a pleasant and lusty fashion.

Gilman ran his powerful fingers through his crisp brown hair until it stood up with a wild northwesterly slant. His good-natured eyes were filled with the astonished pathos of a hound that has lost the scent and does not know what to do about it. He had a distinct feeling that something must be done; but the more he thought, the less he knew. Within him there was a hollow yearning that nothing had been able to satisfy—nothing!

In an effort to convince himself that he could not feel as he did, Gilman mentally reviewed his numerous good fortunes. First of all, Dora Thurley had promised to marry him as soon as the drive was over and he had collected his season's wages. Dora was

the beauty of three counties. Her hair seemed eternally touched with spring sunlight, and her eyes were as big and blue as blue china saucers. When she walked along the road, men grew sad, and it was almost possible to hear them wish that they had not got married so soon.

Don was under thirty, and the boss of a big drive. Sometimes good men had to wait until they had achieved a hard-bitten twoscore years before their judgment was trusted to take a small fortune in logs from the lumber woods to the lake. Moreover, he had money saved, so that next year he would be able to buy an interest in a log job. Everybody knew this, and older men treated him with a respect different from the kind he had been able to earn with his fists.

Gilman was a stranger to all sickness, and at first he had thought that this queer, unpleasant feeling might be a gastric ailment; but the experience of others told him that stomach ache was something located in the region of the belt, and his trouble was all over him. He longed for starlight to drink and a mountain top for a pillow. Nothing that he had pleased him. Perhaps he was going crazy.

Self-communion producing no results, Don pulled out the silver watch that was strapped to his belt, and saw that half an hour of good working time had been wasted. With a rumbling sigh he got up and stretched, raising long, thick arms toward the ceiling. The logs had to go over the falls and down the river, no matter how he felt.

"I know what's the matter of ye!"

Gilman whirled, startled, and turned brick color at the idea that Verney Downs might have read his thoughts. The old man removed his pipe and opened fully his agate eyes.

"Nothing's the matter with me," declared Don, and laughed a hollow laugh. "I feel fine. For a plugged nickel I'd take hold of a she-bear!"

"You got spring fever."

The words were not spoken in argument. Downs made the statement as he might have said that it was a fine, bright day, and let it go; but spring fever is an ambiguous term. It may mean a general run-down condition, plain laziness, or love.

"I need better grub than I get here," Gilman retorted, grinning. "That's all the matter with me."

"You need trouble," prescribed Verney, with solemnity. "It's the same idee as when you put a mustard plaster on over where they's a pain. Git married, young feller!"

"Huh!" snorted Don.

"They ain't no other medicine fer what ails ye."

"I calculate to marry Dora Thurley—you know that."

"Do and calc'late to do is a hoss and a jackass," said Downs. "Marry somebody, and git sot fer a hard life. Then ye won't have no time fer spring fever."

"Blah!" grunted Gilman.

He went out into the keen, bright air, damp from melting snows and rich with the promise of reviving earth. From the double falls of the Dunder River came a steady, thunderous roar. Brown water, creamed with spots of foam, slid in a thick, smooth arch over the rocks and crashed in a dirty white explosion. The logs came in ones and twos and clusters—glistening dark bodies that upended ferociously just when they looked most harmless.

Don Gilman was boss of all that. He was boss of the huskies who worked with cant hook and pike pole along the shore—men who rode death as part of the day's work, and faced breaking jams with oaths that hissed upon the air. It was two-fisted work, and he was proud of it, but there was something more for which his soul hungered and thirsted. He did not know what that something was.

Casualty Gilman glanced up the crooked street of the village. What he saw held him motionless there at the top of the Doghouse steps, and for the moment banished thoughts of work. Behind the church, out of sight of the road, but in plain view from where Don stood, Dora Thurley was talking to a man.

The boys liked to talk to Dora, and Gilman was not jealous. This man, however, was Ross Yondon, the outlander. His ways were not those of the mountains, nor those of the other river drivers. It was understood that another man's girl was not to be courted, but Yondon either did not know this or did not care. Gilman had no fault to find with Dora, but there was something about the tall, swaggering Yondon, with his oily black hair and his superior grin, that went against the grain.

The sight of Ross Yondon, leaning on his peavey handle with a great air, was an

irritant to the present mind of the boss. The man ought to be at work with the gang, although he would probably have a good excuse, and Don decided to send him where he belonged. He was not going to have Dora bothered.

The two behind the church did not see Gilman, although he walked openly toward them, and they did not hear him as he crossed the moist brown turf. Yondon was bending over Dora, smiling down into her upturned face, and talking a steady stream of words in a voice too low to carry beyond her ears. She merely looked at him, expressionless, with an occasional slow negative movement of her head. Suddenly he took a step forward and put his hand upon her shoulder, drawing her toward him.

It was at this instant that the face of the girl turned, and she saw Gilman. With a sharp little cry she struck down the other man's hand from her shoulder. Don covered the distance between them in two jumps. He struck Yondon, but with an open hand, and sent him reeling back against the clapboards of the church.

Yondon reached for his pocket. Dora cried out again, incoherently, and the fingers of Ross Yondon remained where they were, gripping something out of sight; but Gilman knew as well as if his eyes had seen. He knew that the outlander's first impulse had been to draw the big clasp knife that he carried.

It was contrary to all custom, precedent, right, and decency to draw a knife in a fight. The boss was astonished and grieved. His opinion of Ross Yondon touched the ultimate depth.

"You're drawing pay for being down there on the river, not for bothering another man's girl!" he growled. "You can go to work or quit the job, and I don't give a damn which you do!"

Yondon shrugged. His hand came out of his pocket, and he grinned. With a jaunty glance at Dora he flung the peavey over his shoulder and turned to go.

"See you later, Dora," he said.

"My goodness!" she exclaimed, under her breath. "He's a fresh thing!"

Gilman looked down into her eyes, bright and blue and impossible to penetrate. Her curved, teasing lips were smiling at him, and warm fingers stole into his hand.

"Does that feller 'bother you?" he asked. "If he does, I'll run him off the job!"

"No!" She shook her head so decidedly that the yellow curls came dancing out from under a blue scarf. "Don't you go and have any trouble with Ross. He's just fresh—that's all."

Don rubbed his chin and regarded her with a feeling of bewilderment. Of course she was right. He did not like fights, and he could understand how a girl would feel about having two men hammer each other because of her. Nevertheless, Gilman had the same feeling that was his when he heard iron give forth a dull, flat sound. Strike flawless iron, and it rings against the ear like music.

"I don't want you to worry, Dora," he said slowly. "I won't have any trouble with Yondon, if he behaves himself."

"That's Dora's nice, big man!"

She cuddled against his arm. Don Gilman heaved a great sigh. He stood on one foot, and then he stood on the other. The river needed him, but he did not know exactly how to break away. He slipped his arm around her shoulders and patted her in a kindly fashion. Funny thing that he should want to go and nurse a lot of logs, when he had his arm around the most beautiful girl in three counties! He could even kiss her there behind the church, if he wanted to; but he dismissed the idea. It would take too long.

There was something pretty bad the matter with him, and he did not know what to do for it. It was worse than spring fever, and it scared him. Any other man in Dunder Falls would have come running, with a lolling tongue, to take his place; and all he wanted to do was to get away from there!

"I've got to go to work now," he told her huskily. "See you to-night, Dora, same as usual."

"Uh-uh!"

She nodded, and sparkled, and released him.

II

GILMAN made rapid tracks for the mill pond above the upper falls, where the logs were being released gradually from a boom for their rough passage. The drive was sent piecemeal over the falls, to avoid bad jams.

Up on the edge of the mill pond Don saw a bright red spot, which he knew for the tam-o'-shanter of Fay Lamoy, the most devoted member of the audience that the

spring drive always called forth from the village. Fay would stand for hours on the river bank, with water seeping over her rubbers, to watch the battle of the plaid shirts. When they broke a jam with dynamite, somebody always had to pull her back out of the way of flying splinters.

Just now she was underfoot as usual, for Gilman wanted to inspect the chains that held the boom, and Fay was perched upon the stump to which they had been made fast.

"Hello!" he cried, with a new note in his voice. "How's the river drivers' nuisance to-day?"

"Able to stay on the job while the boss takes it easy in the Doghouse—or sparks his girl," Fay told him. "How do you like that, mister?"

Nobody had ever so much as hinted that Fay Lamoy was a raving beauty, but she could keep a man pleased with her and himself. If it had not been for fluffy black hair and a pair of dark eyes into which a man could look a long way without reaching bottom, she would have been plain. Moreover, she was only half size in a country where most of the girls grew tall and deep-chested; but she got along well with the river drivers. When they saw her cape flung jauntily over one shoulder, and the flaring red tam, they put new strength against the peavey handles.

"You ought to be ashamed to pick on a man my size," chuckled Gilman.

He lifted her down from her perch as if she were a child. The small body somehow felt interesting. He stood looking at her with his big chest expanded and a renewed pleasure in life asserting itself.

"It sounds better to hear you laugh," said Fay. She had a glance that seemed to creep right through a man. "You looked as cheerful as a crutch when I first saw you coming—almost as bright and happy as old Verney Downs on one of his off days."

"Nothing the matter with me!" protested Gilman. "Verney Downs says I've got spring fever, and ought to get married, so I'll have some real trouble. He's a funny old goat!"

"Not half as funny as you are," Fay said, with conviction. "I'll bet I know what's on your mind now. You've had a run in with Ross Yondon."

"How do you know that?" demanded Gilman.

"Because he showed up with a face like a thunder cloud just before you did, and you both came from the same direction."

"Well!" He managed a laugh. "I don't want you to spread it around, but I had to cuff him this afternoon. I know how to handle a roughneck that tells the world when he feels wild and mean, but this Yondon don't know any better than to pull a knife. He started to to-day, only Dora yelped, and he stopped. He'd been bothering her."

"Oh!" Fay Lamoy's eyes grew intensely black, and looked as if there were live coals far down in them. "So Dora had to call on you for help, did she?"

"Well, not exactly," replied Don, and he related the story of the happening behind the church.

Fay heard him through in silence.

"What are you going to do about it?" she asked, when he had finished.

"I thought I'd let it die down, unless he makes more trouble."

"Then what?"

"Oh, I'll fire him!"

"And—oh, soap suds!" She stamped her foot in a mud puddle, and splashed both of them. "You don't know much, do you?"

"Not very much, I suppose," admitted Gilman, with a grin. "What do you want me to do?"

"Knock the everlasting tar out of him right off!" cried Fay.

"I didn't know you liked fights."

"I don't, but I'd like this one! I'd love it! You've got to wipe up the floor of the Doghouse with Ross Yondon!"

"You don't mean that I ought to do it whether he starts anything or not?"

"That's just what I do mean. Snap into it and bust him!"

"Gosh!" Don became thoughtful. "You remember what I said about his starting to pull a knife? He's got a patent clasp knife with a blade six or eight inches long."

"Get yourself a knife, then! Take a shotgun to him!"

"No, sir!" Don Gilman shook his head with violence. "When I get so feeble I have to take a gun or a knife to a man, I'll join the ladies' sewing circle. I won't try to be a river boss any more. It's different with him. He's an outsider; but I was brought up around here, and the boys would think I was afraid."

"Oh, Lord!" Fay threw up her small, brown hands in helplessness. "When men don't make me laugh, they make me mad! Go after him with your teeth—will you do that?"

"That's all right," replied Gilman, in all seriousness. "There's no harm in taking a chaw out of a man's ear, if you can get in close enough, but it's his knife that worries me. He might stick it into me somewhere that would do a lot of damage. There are places in a man where you can't stick a knife without hurting him bad. I wouldn't get laid up in bed for a million dollars—not until after the drive's over, anyway."

Fay Lamoy planted herself in front of Don, and held his eye with a gaze that would not be denied. Her hands became fists under the intensity of her emotion.

"Do you want to be happy in this world?" she demanded.

"Of course! I—"

"You never will be, unless you lick Yondon right off."

"You mean they'll think I'm afraid of him if I don't?"

"No—I don't know anything about that. It's something else."

"What?"

"You'll find out later on. You'll find out, anyway, and you'll wish you'd listened to me!"

"Now, Fay, you want me to jump on a man for nothing—"

"Look here, Don Gilman! You've got it in you to take a knife away from Yondon and paste him on the nose, if you want to; but the wheels in your head creak so you can't hear yourself think. I'm trying to do you a favor, and you don't know it. Wallop Ross Yondon—will you?"

Gilman looked up at the pale sky, dusted with little fragments of cloud, off toward the snow-capped mountains, and down at his mud-spattered boots. He felt very much like a puppy that is trying hard not to see the rug he has just chewed. However, the lady refused to stop trying to fasten his attention upon it. He sighed and gave up.

"If Yondon makes a move that gives me an excuse, I'll hand him one, Fay; but I don't want to jump a man for nothing. How's that suit you?"

"For nothing!" she sniffed. "Well, let's hope he'll give you a chance. Unless he does, you're going to have bad luck!"

Fay Lamoy threw up her head with a gesture that might be construed as consigning him to the bottom of the river, so far as she was concerned, and walked away. He watched her with a mixture of relief and regret. Certainly he always enjoyed living while Fay was around.

III

GILMAN leaped for the log raft and ran out upon it as lightly and easily as a dancing master crosses a floor. He felt at home with that rolling, shifting surface under him, and his mysterious ailment of the early afternoon withdrew from him somewhat. Yondon was across the river, but Gilman could not make himself hate the man.

What had made Fay so fierce for war? Never before had he known her to show genuine ill will toward anybody. It must be that Ross Yondon had done something to her. Gilman could think of no other explanation, and this darkened his spirit again. He would have to take hold of Yondon, if the man did not behave himself.

As he continued to think of a possible annoyance to Fay Lamoy, he became more and more firm in his feeling about the outlander. It was a shame to pick on a girl as small as Fay!

That evening, when Don Gilman went down into the Doghouse after supper, there was a worried line between his brows. He felt more like having trouble with Yondon than he had when Fay first mentioned it. A knife was bad business. Anyway, he was not going to disgrace himself by using a gun—not if he died with six inches of steel between his ribs.

The instant he stepped over the threshold, he felt that there was something unusual in the air. He felt it from the half hush that fell upon the basement even before he saw the hand of Yondon go, with a broad gesture, into his pocket and bring forth the clasp knife that had been the cause of more than a little comment from the gang.

Ross Yondon looked across the room and grinned at Gilman—a white-toothed grin that had something of the quality of a sneer. From another pocket the knife fighter took an oilstone. With the deliberation of an actor playing to an audience, he set the stone firmly upon one knee, and held it there while he pressed the button

that snapped open the enormous blade of the knife.

With ostentatious care Yondon began to hone his knife, drawing it back and forth on the stone with a little whining sound. It had grown so still in the Doghouse that this sound could be heard.

Old Verney Downs opened his half closed eyes and indulged in the unusual exercise of sitting up straight in his chair. The river drivers looked from the boss to Yondon, and back again. Every blackguard has a following, and there were two or three men who grinned; but for the most part the gang remained in a sober silence which betokened disapproval of knives.

Gilman knew that he must carry the matter through, or he would never be able to handle that gang of men again. He had received no direct challenge. Dora Thurley did not want him to fight. Fay Lamoy had urged him to thrash Yondon. He wondered how he felt about it himself. He wished he were sure that the outlander had bothered Fay.

Meanwhile the seconds were passing. He swept the room with his gaze, eye to eye, and spoke into the silence.

"Steve Gobo! You here? Take five men to-morrow morning, Steve, and tail up from the Spruce Hill bend down to the falls. Jimmy Furlong! You and Ves Labombard go on ahead two or three miles, and keep the logs off the flats. The rest of you stay at the boom and let 'em out slow and easy, the way you did to-day. You hear? You, Yondon?"

Ross Yondon took his knife from the stone and tried the edge with his thumb. He frowned at the condition of the point.

"Sure!" he said to Gilman.

The tension in the room eased. Don Gilman knew that he had ridden the situation down, and with a deep breath of relief he turned and went out into the night air. His victory was only for the moment, however. Nothing was settled permanently. Yondon had refused the chance to make an insulting reply when the boss had spoken directly to him, but there had been no change of heart in the man.

The boys knew that Don spent his evenings with Dora Thurley, and his departure from the Doghouse could not be taken as a retreat. Nevertheless, it would be well for him to show himself there later that evening. Now that he had got the upper hand without a fight, he must keep it.

Gilman found Dora in the parlor of the Thurley home, playing some kind of tinkling, thumpy music on the piano. Except for the difference in clothing, she looked like pictures he had seen which purported to be those of angels. She came over and sat down beside him on the sofa, and he let a careful paw down upon her white, soft hand. He caught himself wishing that he were in bed, and instantly kicked such a heresy out of his mind. Any man who could sit here and hold hands with Dora Thurley ought to be happy.

"You didn't get into any fights, did you?" she asked.

In spite of her seraphic smile, there was a searching quality in her blue gaze.

"No, not yet," he replied; "but I guess maybe I'll have to. Yondon is acting kind of mean, and I've got to keep the gang in hand."

"No, you won't have to, either!" cried Dora sharply, and her hand withdrew itself from his.

"You needn't be afraid," said Don, with a laugh. "I can take care of myself."

"Let Ross Yondon alone! He's got an awful temper."

"By jinks!" exclaimed Gilman, with sudden animation. "I'm beginning to wonder whether you're worried about me, or whether you're afraid I'll hurt Yondon! Which is it?"

"What are you talking that way for?" demanded Dora, and she began to breathe faster. The two spots of color in her cheeks grew brighter, and her shoulders set themselves stiffly. "Who's been talking to you and filling your ears? You'd never think of such a thing as that yourself!"

Don resorted to that rubbing of the chin from which he derived comfort in times of mental stress. He was sleepy, but not too sleepy to suspect that Dora Thurley had a rather low opinion of his intelligence. It was the first time he had ever thought about what she might think of his mental qualities.

He took the girl by the shoulders and looked at her eyes. He could not look into them.

"Are you sure you've picked out the right man, Dora?" he asked.

There was an instant of silence. Then the corners of her mouth turned upward and her lips parted in a smile. Two arms molded close to perfection rose and crept around his neck.

"I've picked out the man I want to marry," she cooed; "and I'm going to marry him as soon as he gets paid off on this job. Does he like to hear that?"

Any man would have liked to hear it with those rounded arms brushing his cheeks and that pale gold head leaning closer and closer. Don Gilman woke up, and for a time he forgot that there was an unsatisfied longing in his soul. He decided that he was, after all, a happy man.

However, by nine o'clock Don was sleepy again. One kiss is a good deal like another, unless they are served with the cream and sugar of an inward and possibly spiritual enjoyment. Gilman felt that lackadaisical condition which had been diagnosed as spring fever, and at the first hint from Dora that it was time for her to go to bed he took his departure.

IV

ONCE out of doors, Don revived and remembered that he ought to stop in at the Doghouse. As his feet thumped upon the stairs, a picture of that long-bladed knife came into his mind, and his stomach muscles shivered. He would have faced the certainty of a thorough hammering, with a broken rib or two thrown in, without a qualm, but a knife gave him the creeps.

Some of the boys had gone to bed when Gilman entered the basement, but there were enough of them left for a good audience. Ross Yondon was sprawled out on a bench near the door.

A burst of laughter died away as Don stepped into the room and closed the door. He knew that Yondon had been talking about him, because Verney Downs came out of a doze and hitched up in his chair. For the second time that evening sleep vanished from the old man's eyes.

Yondon's hand went down into his pocket and came out with the knife, and then with the oilstone. This second knife sharpening could hardly be ignored. Gilman understood now that Yondon was trying to work on his nerves systematically—trying to laugh him out of Dunder Falls and off the river. The outlander had been around long enough to learn that a knife was the last thing a native wanted to face, and to his mind it was no disgrace to use one.

Don Gilman knew that the attention of the Doghouse was focused upon him, and that his moment of trial had come. The

dim light revealed eyes glistening with tense interest, pipes poised halfway to the mouth, woolen-clad forms rigid and waiting for whatever was going to happen next.

The bright steel continued to whine back and forth across the oilstone, and Yondon grinned, without mirth, into the face of the boss.

Gilman walked slowly across the room and stopped in front of the knife sharpener. He looked down into eyes which were close enough for him to see the flecks of greenish gray in them. Brown with spots, they were, and now they gleamed like cats' eyes in the dark. Yondon slipped the oilstone back into his pocket, but he did not close the knife.

"You act as if you might be getting ready for trouble with somebody," said Don in a low voice.

"I'm getting ready to skin a skunk," sneered Yondon. "When I'm all set, I'll call you!"

There was an uneasy laugh from his two or three followers. At that particular point of time Don Gilman got madder than he had ever been before in his life. His spring fever reached a crisis. He forgot all about the six inches of cold steel that was something less than a yard in front of his stomach, and pointed in that direction. Both of his capable hands reached for Ross Yondon, and took a grip upon him at the neck and the waistline.

Gilman had never made a quicker movement. He jerked upward and threw his body back with the same movement that he would have used to toss a bale of hay upon a load. He called upon his full strength, and put all the power there was in his back and shoulders into a single effort.

Yondon rose from the bench into the air, and when Gilman let go he went down in a long arc, to crash his head and shoulders against the door. The old-fashioned iron latch broke with a clatter, and Yondon lay across the threshold, with the door swinging open. He did not try to get up.

"Licked him, by crimus!" barked old Verney Downs, with an excitement to which he had been a stranger for a dozen years. "I win five dollars!"

Gilman walked slowly toward his fallen enemy, unheeding the river drivers as they stirred and began to press forward. He became conscious of a streak of fire that ran up his arm, and glanced down in sur-

prise. The sleeves of his inner and outer shirts were cut from wristband to shoulder, and flapped, ungainly pieces of cloth, about flesh that was turning crimson.

Don had not known that Yondon struck him. The arm flexed readily. The long cut was nothing, but it might have been death.

Don stopped at the sprawling boots upon the floor. Yondon drew up one leg and twisted over, in an attempt to rise. He was clutching at the door casing when a woman's shrill cry split through the mutterings and the awed curses of the gang. It came from outside, to cut the murky air of the Doghouse and jerk Gilman's head up as if it had been a hand at his throat.

Dora Thurley flung herself down the steps, and for an instant stood poised above Yondon, with her hands pressed to her temples. Then she dropped in a heap beside the prostrate man and lifted his head to her lap, stroking back his hair with incoherent words. He raised his eyes to her face. His glance sought Gilman, and a grin of triumph wiped out all evidence of suffering.

"I win!" he croaked.

Don Gilman's first clearly recognized impulse was to get away. He burst past them into the covering darkness, and up the steps to the sidewalk. There he stood with a head that felt as if some one had laid the hardwood handle of a peavey over it. The village windows, which were still lighted, blurred to his vision.

And yet, in spite of the shock, he was aware, to his astonishment, of a feeling of relief. It was as if he had got air again, after being half smothered.

He started to walk, and almost ran down a small figure that stood in his path—a small form wrapped in a cape, and with two bright eyes looking up at him.

"Fay!" he muttered. "You—what are you doing?"

"I've been hanging around," she said softly, but with a thrill of leashed emotion in her voice. "I told you there'd be something doing if you licked Yondon!"

"You knew!" he cried.

"I didn't know she would follow you tonight, but I was pretty sure she would forget about your money if you punched Ross Yondon."

"Well!" said Gilman, and rubbed his chin. "Well, maybe you won't believe it, Fay, but I was always kind of lonesome when I was with her. I never did have a good time the way I do—with you!"

"I like 'em foolish, the way you are!" laughed Fay Lamoy. "Come up to my house, and I'll fix that arm for you."

"Sure I'll go," agreed Gilman eagerly; "but you needn't bother about the arm!"

He had to go very close to Fay upon the narrow sidewalk, and suddenly he realized that all the symptoms of his spring fever had passed. No longer was he possessed by vague weariness and thirst. He had found starlight to drink and a mountain top to rest his head upon.

THERE GOES MY HEART!

My heart is fully armed,
With grim caparison;
Unwon,
That it may not be harmed.

It will go riding, blue
In cavalcade,
Unhurried, unafraid,
Until it comes to you.

Then in your train will pass a little knight,
Who follows through the dust,
Bannered with faith and trust—
A patient serf, an eager acolyte.

And I will stand apart
And say with pride,
As one who steps aside:
"There goes my heart!"

Mary Louise Mabie

Forgotten Village

OLD JAKE AMES, THE REFORMED SOAK, CONDUCTS A NEW
AND STARTLING EXPERIMENT IN SOCIAL REGENERATION

By William Dudley Pelley

GEORGE KENYON, foreman on our daily newspaper, came into the office one Monday morning chuckling ironically.

"Want to hear a good joke, boys?" he demanded.

The office staff, making ready for the new week's labors, turned inquiring faces.

"Well?" demanded Pinkie Price, local reporter recruited from our high school.

"Old Jake Ames has got religion!"

Mildred Carter, only two weeks up from a Brattleboro business college, frowned angrily when all the others laughed.

"Who is he, and what if he has? I don't see as it's anything funny if some person turns over a new leaf and tries to do right."

"You might, if you knew old Jake."

"Well, I asked you—who is he?"

"The worst old liar, hypocrite, and beer soak in Paris County."

"Who said so?"

"I said so. Everybody knows it. You would, if you'd lived here long enough."

"When did it happen?" I inquired, taking the cover from my typewriter.

"In Calvary Church, last night."

"How'd you ever happen to be at church last night, George?"

"I wasn't. I heard the news from my wife. Seems old Dr. Dodd took it into his bean he'd preach 'em a revival sermon, and stir things up. He sprung it as a surprise, and preached a lulu. At the close he called for all the repentant sinners to come up forward, and old Jake responded."

"Well?" demanded Mildred. "I'm still waiting to get the humor of it, so I can laugh."

She had spoiled George's pleasantry.

"Bah!" he snapped, and went into the composing room, slamming the door.

"George Kenyon didn't explain anything," continued Mildred, "only to call somebody names. Who's this person who's got religion?"

"A sort of town half-wit, Mildred," said I, "who cleaned the Whitney House bar for drinks in the days before prohibition. Since then he's done odd jobs about Uncle Joe Fodder's livery stable and slept in the loft. Claims he's an heir to lots of money, but no one knows where, how, or when, and the town got over taking him seriously several years back."

"I've heard him claim, lots of Saturday nights in the back of Will Seaver's grocery," added Pinkie, "that he has a wealthy half brother somewhere down East. The boys dose him with hooch to start him talking for entertainment."

"What does he talk about?" Mildred persisted.

"What's wrong with the world and society generally. He claims that as a young man he studied to be a lawyer, but found the courts were so unfair that he gave it up. Then he studied for the ministry, but took issue on some point of doctrine. To hear him tell it, at some time or other he's studied for everything from politics to osteopathy, yet something always arose to sidetrack him. Of course he's lying. He's just one of those garrulous old fools who talk for the sake of talking—or, rather, who lie to practice the fine art of falsehood."

Potiphar Buss, an advertising man, having heard George repeat his pleasantry with better success and more embellishments in the composing room, came into the front office in time to overhear this last.

"Mebbe old Jake ain't the fool you all think," he contested. "He might surprise all o' you, one o' these days—'specially if

he ever gets his money. I've heard him talk, and there ain't nothin' the matter with his ideas. If Judge Farmer or Dr. Dodd expressed 'em, you'd think they was mighty darned sensible; but because Jake Ames looketh upon the wine when it is red, and letteth it sting him like a serpent and bite him like an adder, the town thinks they're drivin'."

"You talk as if he really meant what he says, Potiphar," I laughed.

"Well, I was to Calvary Church last night, and I walked home with him afterward. Some of his ideas is pretty darned good, I tell you. For instance, his theories about peopling a lot of New England's abandoned farms with poor folks who can't make a go of things in the cities. It'd help this State a whole lot, if any one ever got such a movement started."

"But George said he'd got religion. Did he talk as if it might keep him off the hooch in Seaver's store on Saturday nights?"

"He didn't say nothin' about that; but he did heave over quite a lot about ways the ordinary man could show his religion in good works. One thing he said impressed me so's I thought of it all night."

"What was it?" asked Pinkie. "I'm going to be shy of items this morning."

"Well, you won't put this in the paper, or I'll box your ears. He claimed he'd had an idee for a long time that when he come into his money he'd invest the kiboodle of it settlin' unlucky folks up in Forgotten Village."

"Forgotten Village!" echoed Mildred. "What's that—a place?"

Now Pinkie had looked upon Mildred some time since, and had observed that she was fair; so he favored her.

"Yeah," he explained aside, "a lot of deserted houses halfway up the back side of Haystack Mountain, on the road to North Foxboro. Used to be called Ferguson Village; but when every last soul moved out, and left the place to fall apart and the fields to go to seed, folks changed 'Ferguson' to 'Forgotten,' because it sounded like it—and Forgotten Village it's been ever since."

"Well, I don't see why this Mr. Ames's idee isn't good. Goodness knows enough people are jammed into city tenements that it wouldn't hurt a mite to get away up there in the backwoods among the spruces! At any rate, it'd be more healthy."

Sam Hod had entered with the morning mail. He heard the last part of Mildred's contention. Vermont's abandoned farms and deserted villages are somewhat of a hobby with my partner.

"That's right, Mildred," he agreed; "only first solve the problem of what's going to support 'em. Then you've done society a darned good service."

"What supports people in country districts anywhere?"

"The land, usually; but take a place like Ferguson—or Forgotten Village, as they call it now—and the land's run out. Nothin' up there but blueberries, timber, and devil's paintbrush."

"Old Jake Ames has got religion," Pinkie repeated to his employer. "He claims that when he comes into his brother's money, he'll move 'em up there and support 'em."

"Old Jake Ames is gettin' to be a confounded nuisance! If he ever comes into any real money, I'll go on record as voting a guardian for him and for it—to keep him off the town!"

II

NOBODY seemed to know the origin of the person we were discussing that morning. He had appeared in town years ago, soon after Camp Eleven timber tract closed down. He became one of the community ne'er-do-wells.

He was an egg-shaped old fellow, inoffensive and more or less ridiculous, with some sort of malady afflicting his left knee. It was as big as a hornet's nest, and bowed outward, in consequence of which he walked with a limp. He usually wore a battered felt hat turned up in the front and down in the back, denim overalls discarded by some stable hostler, and a greenish cut-away coat that was a town institution. No one had ever seen him shaved. Under an iron-gray chin stubble the tobacco juice stained his lips like iodine.

It was on a Monday in late April that George announced the news of his conversion. A couple of weeks went by. Then, like the detonation of dynamite, it stood revealed to us why old Jake had been in Calvary Church that Sunday night.

We were just going to press with the afternoon paper, along about the 10th of May, when the telephone bell rang sharply, and Pinkie's voice came sizzling over the wire.

"Hold the paper!" the boy cried wildly. "I've just stumbled upon a story that 'll rock this town!"

"What's happened—a murder?"

"No, but almost as good. I'm over to Calvary parsonage, but I'll get to the office as quick as I can"; and the wire clicked dead.

Although Pinkie was an adept at going off on youthful tangents, we took the chance, held the press—and missed the county mails. Ten minutes later the boy sprawled into the place as if he brought news of another world war.

"Listen!" he cried, gasping for breath. "What do you think?"

"We don't think anything; but you're dying to tell us something, so shoot!"

"Old Jacob Ames has come into his money!"

We looked at one another in disgust.

"And we've missed the county mails for that?"

"But you haven't heard all! No wonder he's talked so much about Ferguson Village. It belonged to his stepbrother, and now it's come to Jake."

"How long has Ferguson—"

"His brother was president of the timber company that bought all that district to cut off the hardwood. Two weeks ago he was sick, and now he's croaked. Jake was over to Dodd's that Sunday afternoon to ask the minister about a scheme for colonizin' Forgotten Village, and that's how he came to go to church."

"How much has old Jake been left?" asked Sam Hod.

"Dr. Dodd don't know, but he thinks it's a lot, and he loaned him the money to go down to Boston and look after his legacy. Jake's down there now."

"How sure are you of all this?"

"If you don't believe me, call up Dodd. He says old Jake's going to try out a big socialist experiment, like he's entertained this town with for years. He's going to fix up all them houses at Ferguson Village, open the store and the sawmill, and then bring bums up free from Boston and regenerate 'em."

"Regenerate them? He's nothing but a bum himself!"

"Well, I s'pose that's why he thinks he knows what bums need."

"Go ahead with the paper!" bawled Sam. "This yarn can wait till to-morrow—till we've checked up the details." When

the belated duplex was grinding, Sam added: "It 'll take thousands of dollars to put a place like Ferguson Village back on the map. There's nothing up there now but scrub timber, and it 'd take a hundred thousand dollars' worth of fertilizer to bring back the soil. Besides, it was abandoned in the first place because it was too far off the railroad. Old Jake proves that he needs a guardian by not taking such things into account. When's he due back from Boston, Pinkie?"

"Some time to-morrow, Dr. Dodd thinks."

"Well, I'm going over to have a little session with Judge Farmer and the overseer of the poor. Jake Ames will find a businesslike little reception committee awaiting him, if he steps off the Boston train with swag of any size!"

III

News of what "the authorities" were about must have leaked out somehow and reached persons sympathetic to Jake; for our tobacco spitting sociologist did not materialize on our local station platform next day, or for many days thereafter. Apparently he stayed out of the county and out of the State with malice aforethought, until he had the details of his scheme worked out; or perhaps he was waiting to get his legacy in cold, hard cash.

At any rate, a week went past, ten days, a fortnight; and all those who felt themselves divinely appointed to administer other people's affairs bit their knuckles in helpless chagrin. For old Jake was doing things with money from somewhere in a way and at a distance where he couldn't be stopped.

Goods commenced to arrive at the local freight house as if a buyer for a city department store, or a mail-order house, had gone on a drunken debauch. Paint and hardware, furniture and groceries, piled up and up—all addressed to Jacob Ames, Ferguson, Vermont. The agent down at the place declared that there must be from five to ten thousand dollars' worth. Jake was certainly going about things wholesale; and Pinkie Price was right for once, in that no murder, no matter how brutal, had ever aroused the town's interest like old Jake's fool exploit.

For it was a fool exploit, considered from the standpoint of either sociology or economics. The derelict temperament which

scuffs harsh pavements, and filches its food from alley cans, seems to have a constitutional antagonism against nature's silences and the high, open spaces; else it would seek these voluntarily. To entice it into the hills meant a ridiculous extravagance, foredoomed to failure before it was launched.

Never was there such a poring over law books or searching of the statutes to ascertain how Jake could be restrained as occurred in those two weeks before he came back to town. You can't take a wealthy legatee into custody on a pauper charge, and it is equally difficult to declare a person a menace to community morals when he is spending his wealth ostensibly to raise those of other people. It was finally determined that an alienist's jury must sit on the case, and must be convinced, after an equitable hearing, that the old man was incompetent to administer his own affairs; and if Jake's money retained a smart lawyer, even the successful outcome of such an expedient was open to doubt.

Meanwhile Jake's absence was creating another factor in his support—that of public sentiment. A highly interested and entertained town began to evince more concern as to whether the old man could get away with his project than the future possibility of his becoming a tax on the community pocketbook.

Just when affairs were in a white-hot state, who should walk into the office, early one May afternoon, but the cause of all the rumpus, personally?

We had long been aware that before the war old Jake had been an avid reader and disciple of the late Elbert Hubbard. He had apparently attempted to ape that celebrity in his sudden affluence. He had discarded the greenish cutaway for a new Prince Albert with silk lapels—although a blue denim shirt showed beneath it. His ragged locks had been bobbed on a line with his collar, and he had acquired a wide-brimmed Stetson hat. Into the lion's den he walked, and Daniel of old never showed more self-confidence.

"Well!" he cackled, wiping his turkey neck with a blue bandanna. "I reckon this town knows now that Jake Ames means business!"

Sam, in the rear room, was apprised of the ne'er-do-well's reappearance, and secretly dispatched Pinkie, by way of the back door, for Judge Farmer.

"What's the idea, Jake?" he demanded, entering. "What you making a Sears-Roebuck store out of the freight house for?"

"Puttin' a few o' my principles into practice," the old man snapped. "All the rest o' you folks do to save the human race is talk. I'm goin' to have one o' the most thrivin' communities up to Ferguson's they is in this part o' Vermont."

"No, you're not, Jake! The authorities won't let you, and you might as well know it first as last."

"Let 'em try to stop me!"

"Well, they're going to stop you. We're going to attach all that fool merchandise over in the freight house and sell it—turn it back into money to keep you off the town."

"Are ye? I reckon not, because they ain't no fool goods over in the freight house no more. I just see the last truck load start for the village as the factory whistles blew one o'clock."

It was so. The applied sociologist had stolen beat number one on the "town fathers"; and to go up to Ferguson Village and take the whole hamlet out of its lawful owner's hands implied a long process of law.

"Jake," demanded Sam, smiling wryly, "how much cash you been left?"

"I got the Ferguson tract free and clear, with all the seventeen houses and the store and the church that's on it, and ten thousand dollars in money."

"How much have you spent already?"

"Spent? I've spent all of it."

"What? For goods?"

"For goods—and customers."

"You mean you've already arranged for people to colonize your village?"

"Yep, and supplied 'em with cash for their railroad tickets. They'll all be here on the noon train to-morrer—that's the agreement."

"How'd you get 'em?"

"Got 'em? I walked right down into the Boston slums and bagged 'em. None o' your fancy flummiddles for me! When a person's down and out, they don't want no documents to sign, or conditions to comply with, or red tape to fuss over. What they want is ready help and no questions arst—and that's me! I been down and out myself."

"How many people are you bringing up here?"

"Figgered I got seventeen houses that with some fixin' and paintin' will hold six persons to a house. Found from fifty to a hundred—"

"You're bringing from fifty to a hundred derelicts up to populate Forgotten Village? How did you find them?"

"Told you how I found 'em. Went right down into the slums, and when I come to a case that looked deservin', I says: 'Wanna go up in the mountains, live in a big country house, make a fair livin', and have a real chance?' When they says 'Yes,' well, I just handed out the fare and told 'em what train to take. That's charity—no flummiddles."

"You handed them out *real money*?"

"Think I slipped 'em bum checks?"

"And you think a lot of utter strangers will keep their word and come?"

"Most of 'em will be tickled stiff for the chance. It's too darned attractive to let go by."

"Oh, oh, oh! How much good money did you toss around this way?"

"Give 'em ten dollars each, 'cause some of 'em might want a little spendin' money for clothes or food."

"You sunk a thousand dollars on perfect strangers, just by accosting them on the sidewalk?"

"Jesus Christ would 'a' done it that way, I reckon. You see, when you go askin' a person a lot o' sassy questions, and hemmin' him around with all sorts o' conditions, you take away his self-respect. That scares him, or makes him hate you for bein' a snob."

"But see here, Jake! Assuming these derelicts take you at your word and appear, if you've spent all your money, how you going to keep 'em going? What's going to support them up in Forgotten Village?"

"I got it all figgered out—had it figgered out for years. They's the sawmill, and they's the old buildin' that was the Knights of Honor hall. I'm goin' to teach 'em to braid rag carpets. Quite a vogue for 'em among city folks these days. I aim to work up quite an industry. Lord knows Vermont has enough rags!"

Judge Farmer arrived, and little Hosea Moss, the overseer. Sam closed the door of his private office and for over an hour Jake Ames was in there on the griddle; but apparently the old man bested them again. Anyhow, he came out unrestrained and went his way, leaving three thoughtful

men in a room foul with pipe and cigar smoke.

"Well!" sighed Judge Farmer, at length. "Come right down to it, I'm in favor of lettin' him give it a try. Even if he fails, somethin' may come of the salvage. Anyhow, I vote we don't do anything drastic till we've had a look at his customers."

They broke up finally, and went home to supper. Sam was finishing his evening meal when his doorbell rang and the hired girl ushered Dr. David Dodd into the editor's front parlor. The Methodist pastor's face was a study in consternation.

"Brother Hod, it's about the Forgotten Village colonization project that I've called to consult you. I've just learned a perturbing fact, Brother Hod!"

"About old Jake? He's been lying, as usual?"

"About the nature of the unfortunates he's bringing up from the Boston slums to populate his hamlet. Brother Hod, he tells me that *those unfortunates are women!*"

IV

HERE was a pretty kettle of fish!

It was one thing to transport half a hundred broken men up into the Green Mountain spruces and regenerate them, assuming they would come. It was quite another to turn Ferguson Village over to a contingent of tawdry ladies. Hitherto the fathers and mothers of Paris might have grinned at poor, addled Jake's philanthropy; but there would be little grinning if such a settlement were permitted and its members began defying its chaperons.

Seven-league boots would not have been fast enough to carry the editor to Judge Farmer's house, with Dr. Dodd breathing hard to keep up.

"Not much he won't!" roared the venerable jurist. "We halt such crazy doin's before they commence. Get Sheriff Crummett on the wire. Have him call out all his deputies and swear in a dozen extras. We'll throw a cordon around the station to-morrow, and arrest every dratted female vagrant that gets off that train!"

"We'd better do it on the quiet, judge," Sam Hod advised. "Jake's proved that he's cunning. He got the bulge on us twice before, and may do it again. What if he unloads 'em down to Bryant's, or Hastings Crossing?"

"All right—keep it quiet; but this county ain't goin' to be tarnished by no

such influx as that. We're a law-abidin', Christian community—and we're goin' to stay such!"

And yet the trio might as well have tried to keep quiet the departure of the American Expeditionary Force for France. Worse than fire applied to spilled gasoline, the news sped over the valley that night, doubtless due to the swearing in of the extra deputies. The lawless element howled in glee, but the average churchgoing Parisian grimaced.

Jake himself, in a state of partial barricade at Uncle Joe Fodder's livery stable, was subsequently waited upon by an indignation committee headed by another dominie—the Rev. Gustavus Gates. The Rev. Gustavus's career in town has been one long battle to counteract the iniquity of mankind in general. Cut from the same material out of which all the Cotton Mathers of the universe are fashioned, his pastorate has been one long castigation of Bill Lowry's saloon—when we had saloons—Joe Cummings's billiard room, the French club on Water Street, the shameless prevailing fashions, the modern dances, and the general lack of stamina in the National Board of Moving Picture Censorship. Not a bad man at heart, you understand, but a moral martyr born in an age when he found it extremely easy, on all sides, to mart.

"Yaas, they're women. What of it?" demanded Jake. "I allus did have a particular soft spot in my heart for slum women havin' a durned hard time to make a go o' things. It's double as hard for a woman to come clean as it is for a man."

"I'm afraid, my dear sir," declared the Rev. Gustavus dourly, "that the soft spot isn't half so much in your heart as in your head!"

"Where's your Christian principles you're allus bangin' your pulpit about? How does bein' female damn a person from the chance to make good?"

"My first duty is toward the youth of this community; and the juxtaposition of Ferguson Village loaded with social dynamite is not attractive."

"Who says the village is gonna be loaded with social dynamite?"

"We won't go into that, much as you'd probably like to argue it. Your diseased old mind has probably been mulling it over for years. In your absurd and unfortunate affluence you fancy you see the opportunity to indulge your Sadistic tendencies—"

"So you think I'm a fool, just because they's a certain class o' woman I think should have a chance?"

The way Jake asked it caused the minister's temper to slip.

"You're not only a fool—you're a public menace!"

"I know I'm tryin' out a little bit o' practical religion. Not to put too fine a point upon it, while I'm about it, I reckon I see a way to pay back this town for the way it's allus ragged me."

"I warn you, sir, we'll stop it!"

"Go as fur as you like!"

Whereupon Jake started off into a harangue of homely eloquence about the attitude of the Man of Sorrows toward life's unfortunates, and ended by swearing his disinterestedness in their sex and plight.

All to no avail. He was to be taken into custody as soon as the train arrived next day, on charges so many and so grave that he would be not far removed from a blowzy old fly flattened by a sledge hammer. Then, after the deportation, would come the deluge—for philanthropic Jacob.

Industries had to stop that next afternoon; stores had to close. I solemnly aver that after the midday meal a mob of not less than two thousand people jammed the station yard and vicinity. One might imagine a circus was playing the place with the parade overdue. Upper windows were occupied, and young bucks fought for positions on veranda roofs. Chief Hogan commandeered enough rope from Turner's hardware store to line off the station platform for the legal shambles. The event, so to speak, had the town by the ears.

The Rev. Gustavus Gates had shoved himself in ahead of Dr. Dodd now, in all this civic retaliation. It was somewhat pathetic, the way he walked that empty stretch of roped off space in front of an ever swelling audience, his hands behind his back, his spectacles halfway down his painfully sharp nose. Just what he expected to do, no one seemed to understand; but whatever there was to do, he would undoubtedly do it.

Jake Ames, in his big new Stetson and his Prince Albert coat, sat rather contemptuously off to one side. For once he was shaved; but whenever the Rev. Gustavus approached him, he spat tobacco juice out defiantly, and once the minister had to jump ludicrously.

Sheriff Crumpett and Judge Farmer kept close to the philanthropist. The officer had a warrant for the old man's arrest as soon as the evidence arrived from Boston. If Jacob knew it, he made no remonstrance; but I saw something sardonic in his eyes and manner that started me wondering if this eccentric odd-job man was the imbecile Paris took him to be.

Then came the whistle of the locomotive from down the freight yards, and the white furl of its steam up between the aisles of freight cars. It pulled up into the station and crashed to a halt, with sparks pitting from its brakeshoes and a final whistle of expiring air.

Regular passengers on the Flyer, that afternoon, certainly got the jolt of their lives to alight upon that roped off platform and see what confronted them. For so taut were the nerves of some of the deputies, and so uncertain were they as to what they were to do and how they were to do it, that they had revolvers out, pointing them at any one who came near.

Drummers swung off, recognized business men who had been in Boston for goods, and fifteen or twenty quite respectable-looking dames with hot, sweaty children barnacled to them. Here and there was a young lady with a hand bag, but most of them were locally known. Relatives excitedly apprised them of what was in progress, and they turned to watch.

The platform cleared again. Scarcely a person had alighted who by the wildest stretch of the imagination could be suspected of leading a life not entirely proper. Judge Farmer began to look silly. Sheriff Crumpett commenced to look sick.

"Phweré are they?" demanded Mike Hogan wrathfully. "Oi thought yez had a flock o' wild daisies to pick!"

"I guess," said Sam weakly, "there must be some mistake."

By this time the crowd was hooting and booing loudly. Some of the catcalls threatened mischief.

"I think you're a lot of double-barreled jackasses," Will Seaver, the grocer, announced. "Old Jake says he handed out his ten-dollar bills hit or miss, didn't he? Can you conceive of city derelicts, male or female, hanging on to any such easy money till a special morning for a particular train? They probably took him for some new brand of nut, and forgot all about him within an hour after the cash was blowed."

They turned toward the philanthropist. "Well, Jacob!" snapped Judge Farmer. "What you got to say for all this brilliant business?"

The old man's face was rather pale now, but he did not lose his poise.

"The brilliant business is all your doin', remember. You got up this reception committee. Go ahead with the doin's!"

"But there's nobody here to receive."

"Ain't they? Well, well, well!"

"See here, have you sent them warning? Have you attempted to make fools of the authorities?"

"Law's sake! You really think I could do that?"

"You're a jurist, judge!" cried the Rev. Gustavus. "Can't you jail this fellow for contempt of court? Here we've gone to all this trouble, and he's deliberately spoiled it!"

"Hev I?" demanded Jake.

The conductor had waved his arm, and, with a serried bang of the coaches, the Flyer was slowly groaning its way out of the station.

"Yes, you have! It's just like you to do it. You never was a person whose word could be relied on."

"How hev I spiled anything?"

"Where's your derelicts?"

Jake Ames arose. A thousand eyes were upon him to see what he would do; but, with the train now vanishing up the tracks, he merely glanced about the vicinity. Dramatically—with a slight smile twisting his tobacco-stained lips—he raised his cane and pointed.

"Thar's one!" he announced.

V

THE tracks were now cleared, and across them Paris saw a woman. She was a bowed little wisp of a girl. She wore a floppy hat with crushed flowers, and a shoddy tailor-made suit. In her aching arms was an infant; at her feet a shapeless bundle in a dark brown cloth. Evidently she had alighted on the wrong side of the train, and had waited for its departure.

The infant had awakened, and was crying distressfully. With face deathly white, uncertain where to go or what to do, she beheld that bumbling, milling snarl of humanity assembled to extend her community hospitality. With the possible exception of the Rev. Gustavus Gates, not a man or woman stared at her whose heart did not

go out to the picture she made in her plight.

Twenty-one deputy sheriffs, led by their chief and three regular policemen, and followed by a gleeful mob of two thousand booing people, to take into custody one terrified little Bostonian who had kept faith with old Jake, and who was there to populate Forgotten Village! As Pinkie would say, *some* situation!

"Who are you?" roared Judge Farmer, descending on the girl as the crowd broke the ropes.

She couldn't flee, with her baby and her baggage. She simply cringed in her panic and tried to find her voice. It finally came:

"I'm M-M-Mrs. M-M-Mary Webbins, and this is my b-b-baby. A nice m-m-man who met me down to Boston said if I'd come up here, I could have a home in the country for little Rudolph."

Judge Farmer blinked, stupefied. He looked at the frail little figure, bowed with the weight of the infant. He looked at the small, wan youngster and back to the oversized eyes of the mother.

"Oh!" he said dully. "So this baby is Rudolph?"

At the moment, in proof that he was Rudolph, the infant kicked, and nearly broke the crystal in Judge Farmer's pumpkin watch.

"Yes, sir. The nice man said, if I'd come up here and populate a town—"

"Are you married?"

"Yes, sir—o' course I'm married. Ain't I got a baby?"

"Where's your husband?"

"He's—d-d-dead. He died last March, from his army trouble he got, fightin' to France."

Not a man or woman present but saw the thin golden loop on the third finger of the girl's left hand.

"Christmas!" cackled Hosea Moss. "All armed to the teeth for a war on Satan's hosts, and nothin' to catch but a little one that's *married*!"

"What's the matter?" the child widow faltered. "Ain't it all right? Ain't there no t-t-town for me and little Rudolph to populate? We can't go back! The ten dollars he give us was all the m-m-money we had!"

Then she saw Jake; and Jake, being loosed in the general stupefaction, reached her in a limping run.

"Get back, all o' you, you meddlin' sons o' guns!" he roared. "Yes, they's a town for ye to populate! They's a fust-rate town o' seventeen houses, and you kin set up with your tad in every one of 'em. Leg-go me! I ain't done nuthin' but try to show my religion to them that's out o' luck. I'm takin' care o' this little girl, and if any one tries to stop me I'll baste 'em in the jaw!"

He put his arm around the narrow, threadbare shoulders beneath the floppy hat. With his other hand he picked up the bundle of uncertain shape.

"You come with me, honey. I got a nice ottermobile waitin' out back o' the station—and I hope this town has learned its lesson!"

"Learned its lesson?" gasped Judge Farmer.

"Yes, sir—learned its lesson. A fine show you-all made o' yourselves! Jest shows whar your Christian religion lies. You allus did think me a fool, but here's where I turned the tables. I guess I made you-all out unkinders fools, in the eyes o' your Maker, than you ever tried to make me!"

Judge Farmer seized him roughly.

"Look here, Jacob Ames, just what are you driving at?"

"I never told old Dodd, or anybody, that the women I was fetchin' up to Ferguson was single."

"You said you got them in the Boston gutters!" cried the Rev. Gustavus.

"And your lurid imagination done the rest! Well, they *be* women I picked up from the alleys and slums; but every mother's daughter of 'em is some pore young widdler, breakin' her back and her heart, tryin' to support her own lawful kids. For years I been thinkin' how wrong the world was, with them cramped down there in them smelly tenements, and the fresh air up here in the spruces, where they's hundreds of unoccupied houses fallin' apart; and I reckoned if I ever had the chance, I'd use my great wealth to bring the two together."

"Your great wealth—ba-a-a-ah!" cried the Rev. Gustavus Gates. "Ten thousand dollars!"

Judge Farmer laughed wryly.

"And yet only one made good with you, Jacob?"

"Don't you s'pose I knowed from the start that all you gapin' cusses 'd be on

hand to see 'em arrive? And didn't you s'pose I thought of their feelin's? So I fixed up with Harold to send just this one little kid up here on this train, to teach you a lesson."

"Harold! Who's Harold?"

"My stepbrother's boy. He's in the scheme with me, and he's lookin' after the colony. We hired a whole day coach to fetch 'em up, 'cause the kids might raise such an unearthly racket; and from White River Junction we routed 'em up to Hebron, t'other side the mountain. If nuthin' ain't went wrong, they already been in Forgotten Village since twelve o'clock this noon."

"Great Heavens!" cried the Rev. Gustavus. "The man has tricked us! In spite of all our care and precautions, he's tricked us!"

"Shut your fool mouth!" Judge Farmer ordered. "You goin' to use Forgotten Village to rejuvenate babies, Jacob?"

"Why not? Don't you s'pose, bein' a bum so much myself, I knowed I couldn't get men to come up? They's somethin' about 'em makes 'em love to knock around in a big city's slime; but women don't—not when they's youngsters. A mother 'll do 'most anything and go 'most anywheres so long's she can make a good livin' and see her kids grow up healthy. I says, b'gad, I'd use my great wealth to let 'em; so me an' Harold scratched around, with the help o' the Legion—"

"Legion! What Legion?"

"What Legion do yer think? They's only one, ain't they?—and Harold b'longs

to it. We took care of all the soldier's widders first, and then filled in the rest with whatever we come across. We're goin' to let the kids roll around on the grass in the mountain air, while their mothers braid carpets for the money to raise 'em. I ain't never seen an abandoned farm or an emptied village up here so close to Boston that I ain't thought o' the kids cookin' in the summer and freezin' in the winter, that might be playin' around in the country if their folks could only make a livin'. Well, I'm startin' a community to help 'em do it—in our own case with carpets. You see, Harold's in the wholesale carpet business down to Boston, and he'll take all we make. Now, then, *gangway*, or I'll have your own sheriffs pinch you for unlawful detention of habeus corpus!"

The crowd opened up, to a person. Judge Farmer looked blank and scratched his bald head.

"Sam," said he, "do you know any squirrels? 'Cause I wish you'd cart me off and let 'em store me away for their next winter's breakfast food!"

But Sam did not hear the judge. His own lips were moving as Jake Ames carefully lifted the child mother up into the distant auto.

"B'gad!" he said. "City slums—struggling mothers—deserted villages—to say nothing of the nation's childhood! Well, why not?" A moment later he added: "So they're going to make carpets! The Lord knows there's plenty o' rags in Vermont. I feel like one of 'em myself!"

I HAVE SEEN BETHLEHEM

I HAVE seen Bethlehem, the little town
On the Judean hills, and I have leaned
Out of its ancient gateway and looked down
Upon the sweeping fields where Ruth once gleaned.

I have seen Bethlehem, and I have trod
Its narrow ways by many a pilgrim worn;
Within a temple dedicate to God
Have stood beside the place where Christ was born.

I have seen Bethlehem. How great a part
This little town upon the high hill's hem
Plays in our lives! With an uplifted heart
Henceforth I go, having seen Bethlehem.

Ross Hamilton

As Is

HOW MAUDE'S AUNT DEMONSTRATED THAT SHE WASN'T YOUNG, LIKE HER CHARMING NIECE, AND DIDN'T CARE TO BE SILLY

By Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

MISS CARTER fished out the last doughnut from the kettle of bubbling fat, laid it on a sheet of brown paper, and sprinkled it with powdered sugar.

"They're extra good this time!" she said to herself.

She stood looking down at them. There they lay in rows and rows, feathery light, richly crisp and brown.

"Oh, my!" she cried. "I do wish I could eat just one!"

But even one doughnut would be treachery to Maude.

"You'll ruin your figure and your digestion by eating between meals, Auntie Sue," Maude had said. "Promise me you won't!"

Miss Carter had refused to promise, but she had said that she would try, and she did try. She turned her back upon this temptation, with a faint sigh, and gave a last glance round the kitchen.

Nothing more for her to do here! It was as spotless as a chemist's laboratory. Indeed, that was what Maude wanted it to be like. She said that a kitchen ought to be a home laboratory, and she wanted it all white and bleak and stern.

Even a high white stool had been provided for Miss Carter. She found it very convenient for many purposes, but she *did* like a rocking-chair, and she had apologetically brought one down from the attic. To please Maude she had painted it white, so that it also had a somewhat severe look; but when there was nobody else in the house, Miss Carter always got out that nice, downy old red silk cushion from the hall cupboard, put it into the chair, and sat down and rocked comfortably while she shelled peas or hulled berries, and so on.

The cushion always disappeared before Maude got home, because it would distress her. If she were to see it, she would surely go out the very next day and buy a scientific, up-to-date one—perhaps one like those hard, shiny things that dentists have in their chairs.

Maude disapproved of old, soft, comfortable things, and called them "slipshod." She hated all that was not exact and efficient. It was misery for her to hear Miss Carter talk about putting in "a pinch" of cinnamon, instead of one-eighth of a teaspoonful, and the mention of "a lump of butter the size of an egg" appalled her.

She had bought Miss Carter glass measuring cups, quart measures, pint measures, scales, and sets of spoons of all sizes; and yet, in the making of these very doughnuts, Miss Carter had used that old blue teacup for measuring, and she had put in many "pinches" of things. It made her feel guilty to think of it, but she really couldn't help it. At forty—

Now there was another treacherous thought! Maude never allowed her to be forty.

"Never think of yourself as forty," Maude often said, "and you won't feel forty."

But in her secret heart Miss Carter wished that she could just comfortably be forty. It seemed to her a remarkably nice age to be. Indeed, she felt proud of it. When she went to buy a hat, and the saleswoman said something nice about her splendid head of hair, Miss Carter liked to say:

"It's not bad for a woman of forty, if I do say it myself!"

She didn't say this any more, because it

worried Maude, but there were times when she defiantly thought it. It gave so much zest to life. For instance, that evening when they came back from the picnic, and every one else was so tired, and she wasn't, one bit, even if she was for—

As she left the kitchen and the tantalizing aroma of the doughnuts, another perfume came floating in at the open front door. It was the scent of those dear little pinks and verbenas in the garden.

"I guess I'll go out and sit on the porch for half an hour," thought Miss Carter.

So out she went, and the very sight of the garden on this summer day made her so happy that tears came to her eyes. Maude had improved the house a good deal, but she had been satisfied to leave the garden to her aunt, and it was just as it had always been—a gay, careless sort of garden, with a lawn shaded by fine old trees, and a rebellious crowd of bright, old-fashioned flowers. The sweet alyssum was foaming over the borders of the largest bed and marching down to the path, just as it had done when she was a little girl. There were the rosebushes that her mother had planted, and the privet hedge that had seemed so tall and dark and impenetrable to a child's vision. It was indeed a dear and wonderful old garden!

With a sigh of content, she sank into a chair—and almost at once jumped up again. She mustn't sit out here in her gingham house dress, wearing these old shoes! Somebody might see her, and Maude would never get over it if anybody should see her aunt looking really comfortable; so she went back to the house, and up to her own room.

This was, in Miss Carter's eyes, the most charming room in all the world. The things in it were old, and some of them were not very beautiful, but she liked them—all of them, even the two old calendars on the wall and the French clock that had not ticked for years and years. The dark shades were pulled down against the afternoon sun, and a limpid green light filled the room. The mahogany bureau shone like dark water, and the big four-post bed, with its old-fashioned bolster and the ruffled spread, looked exquisitely restful.

"Upon my word," said Miss Carter to herself, "I believe I could take forty winks! Such a hot afternoon! And there's nothing much I ought to do for the next half hour."

Now the naps of housekeepers are different from the naps of other people. There is always a faint feeling of guilt about them, no matter how much work has been done, or how well earned the rest—always a consciousness of all sorts of other things that ought to be done. Even Miss Carter, whose house was a model of cleanliness and order, had this feeling of guilt, and was quite human enough to enjoy her nap all the more for it.

She settled herself comfortably on the sofa, and closed her eyes. One of the shades flapped softly in the breeze, and she thought that it was like a sail, and that she was floating off somewhere—floating off—

The telephone bell rang.

Miss Carter sat up, frowned a little, yawned, and went downstairs; and over the wire came the voice that was dearer to her than any other voice in the world.

"Auntie Sue, darling, would it bother you if I were to bring some one home for dinner?"

"Bother me?" cried Miss Carter. "Why, of course not, child! You can bring a dozen people, any time you've a mind to!"

"I just thought I'd ask Mr. Rhodes," said Maude.

A very odd sort of feeling came over Miss Carter. She smiled graciously, as people do who wish to hide their emotions from the watchful telephone, and said:

"I'll be very glad to see him, child."

But this was not quite true. She had never heard of Mr. Rhodes before, yet she had been expecting him for five years, ever since Maude was eighteen. She had known that somebody was bound to come and take Maude away, and this was the man—she was sure of it! The way Maude said she would "ask Mr. Rhodes" was enough.

"Well, why not?" Miss Carter demanded sternly of herself. "You couldn't expect a girl like Maude t-to s-stay—Pshaw, I've left my handkerchief upstairs!"

She went upstairs hastily, and lay down on the sofa again for a little while, but she did not go to sleep.

After awhile she got up and washed her face in cold water, and began to get ready for Maude's guest. Naturally Maude would expect her to wear the *crêpe de Chine* dress she had given her aunt as a birthday present, so Miss Carter opened the cupboard door, and there it was—a dark and elegant stranger, hanging there

with a sort of disdainful air among the sensible, sturdy linens and cottons.

She brought it out, took off her loose, comfortable house dress, and struggled into the *crêpe de Chine*.

"A slip-on-dress," Maude had called it.

"A squirm-on dress, I should say!" thought Miss Carter.

She did not like herself in that dress. She looked at her image in the mirror, and she did not like it. A sturdy little woman she was, straight as an arrow. Her face, with its small, clear, regular features and healthy color, and those very blue eyes of hers, was quite as pretty as it had been fifteen years ago—perhaps even more so, because of the patience and the compassion she had learned; but she had long ago forgotten to think about being pretty. She noted nothing except the dress, which didn't suit her.

"Specially designed upon long, slender lines," Maude had said.

"And I'm not!" thought Miss Carter.

"What's the sense in a dress being long and slender, if the person inside it is short and"—she paused—"and roly-poly," she added firmly. "That's what I am!"

She covered up all this magnificence with a big checked apron, and went down into the kitchen again. The dinners that she prepared for Maude every night were so good that it was scarcely possible to improve upon them, but this evening she intended to try. She intended to outdo herself for Maude's Mr. Rhodes.

From the garden she picked enough early June peas to make cream-of-pea soup. The chicken, which she had intended to roast, was not, she thought, quite large enough for three, so she made it into a fricassee, with dumplings beyond description. Then she had a dish of wax beans, and a dish of asparagus, cooked to perfection and seasoned only with plenty of butter, and potatoes most marvelously fried, and she made fresh strawberry ice cream. When you consider what it meant to crack ice and turn the freezer, in that dress with long, tight sleeves and floating things that hung from the shoulders—

She didn't dare to take it off, though, for fear of their coming by an early train, because she knew that even more than a superb dinner Maude would want to see her aunt in all her glory.

Then she laid the table with her finest tablecloth and her grandmother's china,

and with every rose in the garden in a bowl in the center. She really was pleased with the result.

II

As it happened, they came by a late train, so that Miss Carter was sitting on the veranda, looking very calm and leisurely, as they approached. She did not feel so, however. When, around the corner of the hedge, she saw Maude's familiar gray hat, which came down almost to the tip of her niece's pretty little nose, and beside it a most unfamiliar straw hat on a tall head that bent deferentially, she was anything but calm—and, for a moment, anything but hospitable. How could she be glad to see this man who might take Maude away from her?

"He'd never appreciate her!" said Miss Carter. "Not in a month of Sundays!"

Perhaps this might seem a little unjust, when Miss Carter hadn't even seen the man yet; but what she meant was that neither this man nor any one else in the world could know the Maude she knew. He had never seen and never would see the remarkable infant Maude, the neatest baby that ever was, who used to lie out in a basket under that elm tree, her long white dress pulled down perfectly straight, her little dark head exactly in the center of the tiny pillow, her clenched fists lying one on each side of her round, serious face.

How Maude's mother used to laugh at that neat baby of hers! And how she used to laugh at the slightly older Maude who went, every day for weeks, in a pink sun-bonnet and a pink dress, to try to open the garden gate, and each time sat down unexpectedly upon the path!

When there was no mother to laugh any more, Miss Carter had taken on the job. At first she had thought that without her sister she never could laugh again; but it proved easier than she had expected. She found that when the person you love wants anything, you can do impossible things. When figured out on paper, she had seen that it was impossible to send Maude to college; but she had sent her. And now, when she realized how impossible it would be to let Maude go, she knew in her heart that she could and would do that gladly.

"If he's anything like good enough for her," she stipulated.

She felt pretty sure, though, that Maude would never look at a man who was not

admirable. She had seen that this Mr. Rhodes was tall, and she expected him to be marvelously handsome, with knightly manners and a commanding intellect. Maude was so very particular, and so intelligent herself—a private secretary at the age of twenty-three!

The garden gate opened, and there they were. Miss Carter rose with a welcoming smile, but—

“Good gracious!” she cried to herself. “The man’s *old*!”

He carried himself well, this tall man. His face, in its way, was a fine one, kindly and strong and trustworthy; but Miss Carter saw the tiny wrinkles at the corners of his eyes, and the touch of gray in his dark hair, and she was cruelly disappointed. If she had seen him alone, she wouldn’t have dreamed of calling him old, for he wasn’t more than forty-five; but with Maude beside him he was a Methuselah. Maude was so pathetically young! Her very earnestness was such a young sort of thing! She hadn’t really learned to smile yet.

“Auntie,” she said, “this is Mr. Rhodes.”

Over the telephone her voice had sounded very happy, but now there was a note of portentous solemnity in it. She spoke as if she were bidding her aunt gaze upon one of the wonders of the world; and this did not please Miss Carter.

“I’m very glad to see you, Mr. Rhodes,” she said.

She said it pleasantly enough, but in a tone that Maude had never heard before. She looked different, too. No one would have dared to think of her as roly-poly now. Her dignity was such that she actually looked taller.

“Dinner,” said she, “will be served in ten minutes.”

From the way she spoke, there might have been a butler and two footmen to serve dinner. It was hard to imagine that this Miss Carter knew what a gingham apron was. Nevertheless, she put one on as soon as she entered the kitchen.

Almost at once Maude appeared in the doorway.

“Auntie!” she said. “Auntie, do you like Mr. Rhodes?”

“My dear, I don’t know him!” answered Miss Carter, as if surprised.

But Maude, though young, was also a woman, and she knew what a deceitful answer this was.

“Yes, but—” she said, and paused. “You know, auntie, he’s a very remarkable man,” she went on briskly.

“Oh, indeed, is he?” replied Miss Carter pleasantly.

Well, she didn’t think so. When called, Mr. Rhodes came in from the veranda, took his place at the table, and ate his dinner. He said yes, the weather was cool for this time of the year, and no, he hadn’t been in this part of the State before, and yes, thanks, he would have a little more of the fricassee, and the roses on the table were very fine, and he liked roses. Remarkable, was he?

“A wooden Indian!” said Miss Carter to herself.

It hurt her to see Maude sitting there, with shining eyes and flushed cheeks, fairly hanging on the man’s words, and to see that he never looked at the girl in that way. When he did look at her—which was not often—he wore a kind, grown-up sort of smile which Miss Carter thought detestable. He did not appreciate Maude. Miss Carter was sorry she had made ice cream, and she wouldn’t let him have a single doughnut.

When dinner was over, they all went out on the veranda. Dusk had settled over the garden, and the stars were out, faint in the violet sky. A breeze stirred in the leaves of the old trees and swayed the gay little flowers, which, scarlet or blue or orange, all looked white now. It was a lovely night. Even the disapproving and indignant Miss Carter yielded a little to its softening influence, and was silent, thinking of the old, dear things that haunted her garden.

“Do you mind if I smoke?” came Mr. Rhodes’s deep, quiet voice from the dark corner where he sat.

“Oh, no!” said Miss Carter, somewhat frigidly polite.

Nobody had smoked a cigar on this veranda for a good many years. Miss Carter’s father used to smoke. How the smell of the smoke drifting through the dark brought back the memory of that big, jolly man, who used suddenly to chuckle aloud when something amusing crossed his mind! She smiled to herself, thinking of the days when the house had not been the silent, orderly place it was now—the days when she and her brothers had been young, and the house alive with voices, and laughter, and youth.

"And that's what poor little Maude ought to have," she thought. "Young people—*silly* young people—music and dancing. She shouldn't be sitting out here with me and this wooden Indian!"

She made up her mind that at least the man should be made to talk, and in a firm and resolute manner she set about the task of drawing him out. Perhaps, in her heart, she hoped that he would reveal himself as dull and pompous; but he did not.

He was a shipbuilder, the descendant of a long line of Massachusetts shipbuilders. To Miss Carter there was romance in that business, and Mr. Rhodes evidently had the same feeling. He had a sort of reverence for ships, and an inexhaustible fund of interesting tales about them. Not that he was at all eloquent. He was rather a shy man, and halting in his speech, and he needed a good deal of drawing out; but Miss Carter did it.

He talked, and Miss Carter, leaning back in her chair, enjoyed hearing him. She liked the sound of his quiet, careful voice, and liked the fragrant smoke of his cigar. She intended to go into the house presently, to wash the dishes, leaving him and Maude by themselves for awhile; but a dreadful thing happened. There was a pause in the conversation, and suddenly the clock in the hall struck eleven.

Mr. Rhodes got up hastily. He apologized for having stayed so long. He seemed conscience-stricken, and wouldn't even wait while they looked up a train for him. He said good night and set off hurriedly.

"You must come again," Miss Carter told him.

"Thank you," he replied earnestly.

"Soon!" cried Miss Carter, still more earnestly.

"*Thank you!*" answered his voice, from halfway down the path.

"He never will," thought Miss Carter, in despair. "Never! I've spoiled everything! I never even gave him a chance to speak one single word to Maude. Of course he'll never come again!"

And it did not add very greatly to her peace of mind to see that Maude was unusually silent and pale.

"You get right to bed, child," she said. "I'll do the dishes."

"No—I'll help you, auntie darling."

"But you have to get up in the morning," Miss Carter protested.

"So do you," returned Maude.

"But you have to go to work."

"I don't work as hard as you do," said Maude.

This startled Miss Carter, because somehow she never thought of her work as work. It touched her, too, very much, and if she had not been a Connecticut Carter she would probably have cried; but she was one, so she couldn't do that. She couldn't even hint to Maude how sorry she was for her wicked, selfish conduct. All she could do was to be very, very brisk and cheerful, and to fly around the kitchen like a bee.

And there was Maude, drying the dishes, her lovely young face so pale, so grave!

"A meddlesome old maid!" thought Miss Carter. "That's what I am!"

At last she had to say something.

"I think Mr. Rhodes is—*very* nice," she observed, in an unexpectedly loud voice.

"Do you, auntie?" said Maude. "Well, I—I think so, too; but"—she turned away, to put some glasses up on a shelf—"but I'm afraid that he doesn't consider me very interesting."

"Nonsense, child!" cried Miss Carter.

"Well, I'm not," said Maude. "I just don't know anything!"

Miss Carter was on the point of telling Maude that she was a college graduate and a private secretary, and probably the most intelligent young woman alive; but something stopped her. Instead, she said that she must wind up the clock while she thought of it. In passing behind the girl, she laid a hand on her shoulder.

"My dear!" she said. "My dear!"

Their eyes met—those two pairs of blue eyes that were so much alike.

"Good night, auntie," said Maude.

"Good night, Maude," said Miss Carter.

And in those six words they said more than some people could have expressed in an hour's conversation.

III

MISS CARTER, lying awake in the dark, had before her eyes the image of Maude, so pale and grave and so very young, standing there in that dazzlingly white, highly efficient kitchen. The night wind blew in at the open window, fluttering the curtains, and outside in the dark garden a little owl gave its tremulous cry. A great loneliness came over her. She thought of this old house, with all those rooms, so neat and orderly—and empty, standing in the dark, quiet garden, and with herself and poor

lovely young Maude all alone in it. Two spinsters all alone!

"No!" said Miss Carter, aloud.

Miss Carter's forefathers, three hundred years ago, had kept themselves alive on the "stern and rock-bound coast" of New England because of their grim determination; and though Miss Carter had inherited very little of their grimness, she certainly was determined. Then and there she made up her mind; and, what is more, she was positively artful about it.

"I was wondering," she said to Maude, the next morning. "Didn't Mr. Rhodes say that his business was up in Massachusetts? How did you come to meet him, child?"

"Oh, he's a great friend of Mr. Lawrence's," said Maude, very, very casually. "Mr. Lawrence's firm are shipowners, you know, and we write all their insurance for them. Their office is on the same floor with us, and I often—I often have to run in there. Whenever Mr. Rhodes comes to New York, he always stops in there, and I've met him there several times."

"I see!" said Miss Carter brightly.

What she saw was the wave of color that rose in Maude's cheeks. She also saw how a letter could be addressed to Mr. Rhodes, in care of Mr. Lawrence, in the same building where Maude worked.

After Maude had gone, she wrote the letter. She told Mr. Rhodes that she and her niece would be very pleased to see him next Sunday afternoon, and she said that the "best" train was one that arrived at their station about three o'clock.

How could the truthful Miss Carter write such a letter? How could she say that Maude would be glad to see Mr. Rhodes when she never told Maude a word about his coming? How could she call a train a "best" train that stopped at every tiniest station, and that arrived, moreover, at a time when Maude would not be at home? But she did say all this, and was not even ashamed of it.

And then, right under Maude's nose, she prepared a supper which utterly surpassed the previous dinner; and when the poor, unsuspecting girl had gone off to the Sunday school where she taught a class, Miss Carter flew upstairs, put on the *crêpe de Chine* dress, arranged her hair in a new fashion, and just had time to get down to the veranda when Mr. Rhodes appeared.

She kept on in the same deplorably art-

ful manner. Although she was still a little out of breath from her struggle with the dress, she pretended to be so deeply absorbed in the magazine she had just that moment snatched up that she didn't hear him coming up the path. There she sat, looking calm, serene, almost queenly.

As he mounted the steps, she glanced up with a mendacious air of surprise, and rose, smiling, very polite, but still queenly.

"Oh, Mr. Rhodes!" she said. "This is very nice! Sit down, won't you?"

He did so, and Miss Carter began her campaign. She said she was sorry Maude wasn't at home, but nothing could induce that girl to miss her Sunday school class.

"She's so conscientious!" Miss Carter said, and told him several anecdotes about Maude's conscientiousness.

Then she told him how devoted the children in the class were to Maude. There was no pretense about Miss Carter now. She was speaking from her heart, telling him what she knew to be the truth about her dear girl, pleading Maude's cause with dignity and sincerity. This man, this wooden Indian, must be made to realize what Maude was!

Miss Carter watched him pretty closely, but it did her no good, for it was impossible to tell from his face what impression she was making. He just listened. She waited for him to ask questions about Maude, but he did not. After awhile she grew indignant, and spoke no more. He, too, fell silent, and there they sat.

He was one of those persons to whom the sunshine is becoming. In spite of his age and his exasperating silence and his shocking lack of curiosity, Miss Carter was obliged, in justice, to admit that she liked his face. It was honest and keen and strong. She remembered, too, that when he had talked about his ships he had been really interesting. Well, he wasn't going to talk about ships this time. He had been brought here to be taught appreciation of Maude, and taught he should be.

"Your garden—" he began.

"Maude's making a little rock garden," Miss Carter said. "She had the prettiest violets this spring!"

"I like those bright-colored things that grow in the sun better," said he, with a gesture toward the glowing bed of pinks and phlox and verbena. "My mother used to have those things in her garden."

Miss Carter didn't say that she wasn't

interested in his mother's garden, but she looked it, and he seemed a little taken aback. He glanced at her anxiously. He felt that somehow he had said the wrong thing, and that he had better start another topic.

"I'm going up home next week," he observed.

Miss Carter made no sort of reply to this. She could not. Going home, was he? Going away? She thought of Maude's pale, grave young face, of the odd little note in her voice when she had said that she was afraid Mr. Rhodes didn't think she was very interesting.

"He's a—a selfish beast!" thought Miss Carter.

This thought, too, was reflected in her honest face, and Mr. Rhodes saw that once more he had said the wrong thing.

"You see," he explained, still more anxiously, "I'm obliged to go there. My business—"

Miss Carter raised her eyebrows with a toplotfy expression never before seen upon her face.

"Indeed!" she said.

The unhappy man could not imagine in what way he had offended her, but he had no doubt that she was offended. He felt that he must go on explaining.

"You see," he said, "it's this."

From the pocket of his coat he brought out an advertisement. Miss Carter glanced at it, and saw that on the 8th of July, at Rhodes's dock, two schooners were to be sold "as is where is."

"Indeed!" she said again.

He gave up then, and relapsed into total silence.

"Very well!" said Miss Carter, but not aloud. "Go home, then, and stay there! I wish you'd never left your home! Maude was happy before you came. Oh, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

She looked at him, and to save her life she couldn't help feeling just a little sorry for him. He had such a bewildered and miserable air.

"After all," she thought, "he's a guest."

So she went into the kitchen, took six doughnuts out of a stone crock, put them on a plate, and brought them out to the veranda.

"Maybe you'd like one," she said.

It was a mistake. While the man was eating a doughnut, he did not look in the least old, or like a wooden Indian. Indeed,

his enjoyment was positively boyish, and Miss Carter could not help feeling a little touched. She invited him to take another and another.

"Did you make them?" he asked.

"Yes, I did," replied Miss Carter, with modest pride.

"I never tasted anything like them—never!" he declared.

"Well, I like to cook," said Miss Carter.

"You know," he went on, "your niece told me a good deal about you, and—"

"Maude makes the most delicious soda biscuits!" cried Miss Carter, suddenly recalled to her duty.

"She told me all you'd done for her," he continued. "I—I wanted to meet you. I"—he paused—"I knew you'd be—like this!"

It was Miss Carter's intention to greet this statement with an amused, indulgent smile; but she could not. There was something in the man's straightforward glance, in his quiet voice, that filled her with confusion. She turned her head aside, feeling her cheeks grow hot.

"You don't know what I'm really like, Mr. Rhodes," she said.

"Yes, I do," said he. "When I came this afternoon, you didn't see me, at first, but I—I saw you." His face had grown red, but he went on sturdily. "You—you don't know how you looked, sitting there—in your own home!"

Miss Carter understood his speech only too well. She understood, by a sort of instinct, that he was one of those men who see all the romance and glamour of the world about the head of a woman in her own home. She understood, too, that he was very lonely and very homesick; and she made another mistake.

"Tell me about your home," she said. "Your mother's garden—"

He was silent for a moment.

"Well, you see," he said, "when my father died, my elder brother got the old place; and he and his wife—well, they've made a good many changes."

Miss Carter felt a sudden and most unreasonable indignation against Mr. Rhodes's brother and sister-in-law.

"I hate changes!" she said. Then, feeling that she had been too vehement, she smiled. "That's a sign of growing old," she said. "I'm—"

"Old!" he cried. "You!"

Now this was the sort of thing almost

any chivalrous man would have said in the circumstances, but the way he said it—the way he looked at her—

A most curious thing happened. Suddenly Miss Carter saw the Miss Carter that *he* saw—not the practical, brisk, busy woman who was simply Maude's aunt and a good housekeeper, but the woman who had bidden farewell to romance fifteen years ago, when the man she was to have married died. No—this Miss Carter was a charming and gracious woman, and a pretty one. She positively felt the lovely color in her cheeks, the soft tendrils of her brown hair about her temples, and even the clear blueness of her eyes; and all her heart was filled with an innocent and beautiful joy that it should be so.

She sat very still, almost afraid to breathe, for fear of breaking the enchantment. She was so happy!

The garden gate clicked, and, looking up, she saw Maude.

IV

MISS CARTER was a wonderful hostess that evening. Maude was amazed. Never in her life had she seen her aunt so lively and amusing, with such a fine color on her cheeks and such a light in her eyes. She herself was a serious and quiet young creature, as a rule, but this evening Miss Carter made her talk and made her laugh—and Mr. Rhodes, too.

There they sat at the table, a most cheerful little party, with a most delectable tea set before them—a cold baked ham, a salad of tomatoes stuffed with celery, corn muffins, little custards baked in brown cups, strawberries and cream, and a superb three-layer chocolate cake; but Miss Carter didn't seem to be very hungry. It was all dust and ashes to her. Every minute was a penance to her, and every smile she gave was a little stab of pain.

"Maude!" she cried, in her heart. "Oh, Maude, my dear, beautiful girl, talk to him! Laugh, my darling! Talk to him, and make him see! I do truly believe he is a good man—almost good enough for you! Oh, Maude, my darling, laugh, and talk, and be young! Make him see your beautiful, blessed youngness!"

Poor serious Maude was always trying to turn the conversation toward business, always bringing up charters, and marine insurance policies, and so on; and Miss Carter was forever turning her skillfully

aside from these dangers, making her talk about dances and picnics and frivolous and entertaining episodes from her college days. Miss Carter understood the man, and Maude didn't. Miss Carter knew only too well what things pleased and touched him, and she was fiercely determined that he should discover all those things in Maude.

It was very hard, though. Every time she got a chance, Maude began again about business. Her interest in shipping matters was prodigious.

"Do you think those 'two schooners you're going to sell will bring—" she began, but again Miss Carter intervened.

"I saw the advertisement," she said. "For sale 'as is where is'—that's a pretty high and mighty way to do business, I must say! Here they are—take 'em or leave 'em!"

"Well, you see—" Maude began again.

Miss Carter felt sure that the girl wanted to explain to her aunt exactly how schooners were sold.

"Oh, can't she see?" she thought, almost in despair. "He doesn't want to talk business! Oh, why can't she just be young and—silly?"

In the end, for all her gallant efforts, she was defeated. Maude got the conversation where she wanted it, and she and Mr. Rhodes talked gravely about charters.

Miss Carter left them on the veranda, and went into the kitchen to wash the dishes. She wished that there were twice as many. She wished that there were enough dishes to keep her busy all night long, so that she needn't go to bed and lie there in the dark.

She had failed—she knew it. Mr. Rhodes was very courteous and kindly to Maude, but nothing more. All her youth and loveliness were wasted on him. She was trying so desperately hard to please him, and she couldn't!

"Oh, it's so cruel!" cried Miss Carter to herself, alone in the kitchen. "Never mind, my dear little Maude! I'll sell this house, dear, and we'll go and live somewhere else, where there are more young people—more life for you. You mustn't mind—you mustn't care. Just forget all about him! He's going away, and we'll never think about him again—never!"

She heard Maude's light footstep coming along the hall.

"Auntie," her niece told her, "Mr. Rhodes is going."

"Oh, is he?" said Miss Carter.

She dried her hands, took off her apron, and came out to the front door.

"Good night, Mr. Rhodes," she said.

"Good night," he answered.

She could not see him. It was dark out there. She hoped she would never see him again, never remember his face, never think of the words that he had not spoken.

The front door closed, and he was gone. Miss Carter and Maude stood alone in the dimly lit hall, and for a time neither of them spoke or stirred.

"Well!" said Miss Carter briskly. "Time we were in bed, child."

"Yes," replied Maude, just as briskly. "It's late."

Then they looked at each other and smiled. With their arms about each other they went up the stairs and through the dark house, with all its orderly, empty rooms; and at Maude's door they said good night, both of them still smiling. That was their way.

V

It was the stillest afternoon. The sun blazed on high in a blue sky without a single cloud, and all the growing things stood patient and motionless in the fierce heat. Miss Carter was down on her knees, weeding a flower bed. She wore an immense blue sunbonnet and a gay blue and white calico dress. Grubbing down there among her beloved flowers, she somehow had the air of belonging to them—a sort of flower nurse.

"I don't know," she said to herself, "whoever decided which were flowers and which were weeds. Why are the dear little dandelions weeds, when the big, staring sunflowers aren't? I guess it's the same with a good many other things. People look at children, and then set to work to weed them—to uproot all sorts of brave little dandelion qualities in them, and water and tend the big, showy sunflower traits."

Her reflections were interrupted by the sound of the telephone ringing inside the house. She rose, clapped her hands vigorously together to get rid of the clean, warm dirt, and went into the hall to answer the summons.

"Auntie!" said Maude's voice.

"Well, child?" asked Miss Carter.

"Would it bother you if I brought Jack Rhodes home to dinner?"

Miss Carter did not answer for a mo-

ment; but when she did speak, it was with all her usual affectionate heartiness.

"Of course it won't bother me, my dear!" she said. "Any one you want, any time!"

But when she had hung up the receiver, she stood there in the hall with a great weariness and dismay upon her face. All the peace of the hot, still day was shattered—all the peace that she had won through the long, long week. He was coming back!

It seemed to her that she could not bear it. She could not watch Maude, with her shining eyes and her flushed cheeks, looking at the man who returned only a kindly, grown-up smile—the man who did not find Maude's sweet youth "interesting," but turned to herself instead. She remembered how he had looked at her, how his voice had sounded, speaking to her; and that look and that tone should have been for Maude.

"I won't have it!" cried Miss Carter aloud, in an angry, trembling voice.

She felt a tear warm on her cheek, and she dashed it away, leaving a smudge under her eye.

"There I was," she said, "all dressed up, sitting on the porch as if—well, it won't be like that this time! It was that dress—I always hated that dress! Oh, Maude, my dear!"

She felt other tears in her eyes, but she ignored them.

"It won't be like that this time!" she repeated with a grim smile. "You'll see!"

She went out into the back entry and opened the ice box.

"Plenty good enough!" she said. "It won't take me half an hour to get it ready. Now I'm going to finish that weeding!"

Certainly Mr. Rhodes wouldn't bother her. He could come if he liked. There was plenty of good, wholesome food in the house for him to eat; but not one extra touch would she give to the dinner, and not one extra touch to her own appearance. She would have to wash her hands and face and put on a clean dress, but not until after he arrived. First he should see her just as she was.

"As is where is!" said Miss Carter.

So, when she thought it was about time for him to be coming, out she went again, and down on her knees by the flower bed. The garden gate clicked, but she did not raise her head until Maude spoke. Then she rose, dusted off her hands, and turned.

"Good after—" she began.

But who was there? Who was that nice boy standing beside Maude, hat in hand, with such an anxious, appealing smile on his young face?

"This is Mr. Jack Rhodes, auntie," Maude explained.

"Oh!" said Miss Carter.

Then, recovering her senses, she held out a somewhat grimy hand, and the young man seized it in a hearty grasp. His face was scarlet, but his eyes met hers very honestly.

"I—I—it's—" he said. "I—I hope—"

Miss Carter beamed upon him, to reassure him, but he turned an imploring glance toward Maude. No help did he get from her, however. Never had Miss Carter seen that serious young woman so confused. She actually frowned at the poor fellow.

"I *told* you auntie wouldn't mind!" she said reproachfully.

"Yes, I know you did," said he; "but such short notice—"

Miss Carter could scarcely believe her eyes; for Maude shrugged her shoulders and turned her head away, and upon her face there was an expression very like a pout. Now at last Maude was being young and silly, and it was all most thoroughly appreciated.

"There's not much use my telling you anything!" she observed.

"You know it isn't that," said Jack.

They had both entirely forgotten Miss Carter. Maude looked coldly at the young man. Then her eyes fell, and a faint smile appeared on her lips.

"Yes, I do know," she said.

Again she looked at him and he looked at her, and it was the most touching and absurd and beautiful look that Miss Carter had ever seen.

"I'll have to go in and look after the dinner," she murmured; but they didn't even hear her.

She was in too much of a hurry, just then, to trouble her head about the mystery of this second Mr. Rhodes. It was enough for her to know that for Maude he was the right and only Mr. Rhodes; and therefore he must have a dinner such as had never been equaled. She flew about the kitchen like a little whirlwind, and presently enchanting odors began to float out from the oven and from the bubbling saucepans. She rushed down into the cellar, and brought up her best preserves. She rushed

out to the ice box, and brought in a box of eggs, a crock of butter, a basket of peaches, and a bottle of cream. As she hurried about, she was inventing a dessert that should have freshly baked sponge cake and peaches and strawberry preserves and cream in it.

She had just begun to whip the cream when she was interrupted.

"Isn't it a pretty hot afternoon for you to be doing all this?" asked a voice from the doorway.

It was the first and original Mr. Rhodes.

"Good gracious!" cried Miss Carter. "What ever are *you* doing here?"

Suddenly she was aware that she was very hot and tired and flustered, that her hair was untidy, that she was wearing a rumpled and unbecoming calico dress. She also remembered that she was sternly displeased with Mr. Rhodes, and had intended him to see her like this; but she was still more displeased with him because he did so see her.

"If you'll go out on the veranda," she said, "I'll have the dinner ready in a—"

"I want to help you," he told her.

"Certainly not!" replied Miss Carter.

"Please go out on the veranda!"

But he did not go.

"They're out there," he said. "They don't want me."

Miss Carter faced him squarely.

"Who is that young man?" she demanded. "I can't understand—"

"He's my nephew," said Mr. Rhodes. "Perhaps I can explain. You see, he's in Lawrence's office—doing very well, too; and your niece—well, the first time I saw them together, I knew how the land lay."

"Nonsense!" said Miss Carter.

"No," he insisted. "It's not. It's the real thing."

They were both silent for a moment.

"I'm fond of the boy," he went on; "and—of course I saw what sort of girl she was, but I wanted to see *you*." He smiled. "It was a pretty mean trick," he said. "She telephoned to Lawrence's office and asked for Mr. Rhodes, and I happened to be there. I knew she meant Jack, but I answered; and when she asked if Mr. Rhodes would like to come to dinner, I said yes. We arranged to meet at the station, and"—he smiled again—"there I was! Poor little thing, she made the best of it, but—"

"I see!" said Miss Carter.

She took up the egg beater and began to turn it vigorously, so that the noise of it drowned whatever the man was saying. She didn't want to hear, anyhow. A strange and unreasonable alarm filled her. If this man wasn't Maude's Mr. Rhodes—no, she wouldn't think about that. She wouldn't think at all, but would simply turn that egg beater with a prodigious clatter in the earthenware bowl.

A large, strong hand was laid upon the handle of the thing, and the noise ceased abruptly, leaving the kitchen amazingly quiet.

"Miss Carter!" said Mr. Rhodes.

"No!" said she, though she couldn't have explained just what she meant.

"You know you wrote and asked me to come last Sunday."

"That," said Miss Carter, "was due to a misunderstanding."

"I know it was, but I thought—well, you see, I came again. I—I wanted to see you."

Miss Carter left the egg beater and faced him squarely. She stood where the golden light of the setting sun fell upon her soft, untidy hair. She stood there, in her unbecoming dress, with her flushed, tired face,

and defied Mr. Rhodes. She thought that when he really looked at her, when he realized what the true Miss Carter was like, a great change would come over him.

"I couldn't go away until I'd seen you," he said. "And now—"

And now that he had seen her "as is," of course he would never want to see her again!

"Now it's harder than ever to go away," he said. "Now I never want to go away. You don't know how you look—how—how lovely!"

"Lovely?" she cried.

"Yes!" said he. "You do! I mean it."

His steady eyes were fixed upon her face, but Miss Carter would not look at him—not she! It was very well for Maude and that young man to stand and stare at each other, but she wasn't young, and she wasn't going to be silly.

"If you really do want to help me—" she began briskly.

"That's what I want more than anything else in the world!" he told her.

Then she did look at him, and she gave a smile which she believed to be a very sensible, noncommittal, grown-up smile; but it didn't seem like that to him.

CHRISTMAS PILGRIMS

STILL they fare as they have for ages,
Since the days of the Roman sword—
Simple folk and wrinkled sages,
Down to the Jordan ford;

Down from the walls and the towers of Zion,
Men of many a far-spread race,
Where evermore the shadows lie on
The old baptismal place.

Waters that rush and toss and tumble
Under the high banks fleetingly;
Brown-gold waters that surge and rumble
From the Galilean sea.

Just to see them, just to feel them,
Ah, what leagues have been journeyed *there!*
They, the pilgrims, hope to heal them,
Bowing in praise and prayer.

Now that Christmas bells are pealing
Over the earth with a sweet accord,
Let us kneel with the pilgrims kneeling
Down by the Jordan ford!

Sennett Stephens

The Bang-Up Party

TELLING HOW OLIVER AND SYLVIA ATE A MOST DELICIOUS
DINNER UNDER MOST UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES

By Louise Redfield Peattie

"A BANG-UP party," announced Oliver Grant impressively, as two master minds bent frowning attention upon him. "Pommery, extra dry—orchids—the fat of the land. I'm dumping every bean I've got into the pot!"

At which the eyes of his friend, Jenks Jellicot, bulged a little more than naturally. The pure American was unintelligible to M. Franchesi, but although he carried his white *chef's* cap on a proud level with crowned heads, even he bowed deferentially to the magnificence here patent.

"Then it is to be *canapé des truffes et des escargots, bisque, le relevé, coquilles St. Jacques, faisan sarci—alors, la salade?*"

"Artichokes?" Oliver appealed to Jenks.

The authority ran a thoughtful tongue around his lips. Then, folding his hands across a façade which was in itself a voucher for his experience as an epicure, he shook his head decisively.

"Not swanky enough," he declared.

Behind thick shell-rimmed lenses Oliver's anxious brown eyes fastened upon him imploringly.

"Hearts of palm," pronounced the initiated one.

"*Et puis, la bombe glacée,*" breathed Franchesi reverently.

The three stood in a devout silence. Then, with returning briskness, the *chef* inquired:

"And how many covers, *m'sieur?*"

"Two—just two," Oliver's voice trailed dreamily away.

"Golly, she must be some peach," said Jenks, with a glazing eye, "to bring down a feed like that!"

"It isn't half good enough for her," replied Oliver, with simple fervor.

"But it 'll be an awful waste," mourned Jenks. "Girls only peck, and poke at

things with a fork; and you're too far gone to eat at all."

Oliver, his vague eyes visionary, was continuing:

"The center alcove table, of course. Now, how about flowers?"

Franchesi stepped forward, quivering with zeal.

"We have a young lady, *m'sieur*, who is an *artiste* with the flowers. She creates all our finest arrangements. If you will allow me—"

At a snap of the imperial fingers bus boys flew on winged heels. A demure slip of a figure picked its way to them through the maze of bare tables.

"Miss Marietta Maguire," the impresario presented her.

"How do you do?" she said, with a cool, fresh smile at Oliver and a bright eye for the arrested Jenks.

"*M'sieur* gives a dinner—*quelque chose d'exquise*. The flowers must be of the most perfect."

"M-m-m-m!" She cocked her shining black head and half closed her dancing eyes, addressing Oliver. "What kind of a girl is she?"

Oliver swallowed helplessly, struggled to escape from his collar, and ran a despairing hand through his black mop. Then he caught Marietta's gleaming eye, and said with sudden confidence:

"Oh, silvery and slim, like one of those tiptoe flowers, you know. Blue eyes, sort of tendrilly hair—"

He gagged, feeling Jenks's bulging gaze upon him; but the girl nodded competently.

"I get her. How would you like larkspur, lilies, and Cherokee roses in a Sèvres basket? And for the corsage"—she tilted her head again, and Jenks gurgled audibly—"a spray of pale gold orchids?"

Oliver nodded happily, dreamily. Jenks caught him firmly by the arm.

"Come on out of this," he commanded, "before you order blue diamonds for favors and the Prince of Wales for your waiter!"

Once in the open air, on the steps of the temple dedicated to Franchesi's art, Jenks relaxed his prisoning grip to mop his brow.

"Lord, Ollie!" he gasped. "Whoever she is, she'll surely fall for that! You've got the stage set to look like a million. I suppose you'll pull it off after dinner?"

Oliver looked at his friend, and his whimsically crooked mouth straightened into a stern line.

"No," he said. "After that night I'm never going to see her again."

"Wha-at? Then it ain't serious with you?"

"It's serious as hell," replied Oliver grimly. "She's a fairy, brought up in a fairyland of beauty and comfort; and look at me!" He turned to the other man with a savage gesture toward his rangy figure in its baggy clothes. "An ass of an astronomer!" he said bitterly. "Live in a hall bedroom, and press my trousers under the mattress!"

"But if she's got money—" began Jenks, perplexed.

"That's just it," said Oliver briefly.

"I don't see why," objected the inquisitive hedonist.

"Can you see me taking a lovely, delicate, inexperienced girl like that out of the beauty and luxury she's happy in, to my kind of crazy, star-gazing poverty? Forget it, Jenks, old dumb-bell!"

He whacked his friend on the shoulder, and, cheerfully whistling a dirge, stepped forth in descent of the steps.

"All right!" assented Jenks unwillingly; and, balancing his derby on his head and his cane in jaunty fingers, he followed his companion. "What you going to do after dinner?" he wanted to know.

"Drive back to town for the Midnight Frolic. I've sold my soul for center aisle seats; and after that—"

"Yeah?" inquired Jenks, opening the door of his powerful-muzzled red roadster.

"I'm going to Honduras," finished Oliver.

Jenks stopped on the step.

"What the devil—"

"There's an eclipse of the sun coming—it'll be total down there. The observa-

tory's sending a man, and I've wangled the job. It'll be hot as the hinges down there, but it's hell itself to hang around her!"

"But look here—Honduras!" protested his friend. Something grim in Oliver's face made him relapse into silence and relax limply against the car. "Anything I can do to help you get fixed?" he offered wanly.

"Yes," said the other readily. "Lend me the Blunderbuss."

"Delighted," acceded Jenks; "but—not to go to Honduras?"

"No." Oliver grinned. "To take her to the party."

"But if you're going to Honduras," began Jenks, with exasperated emphasis, "why do you blow in all your dough on an affair that's an absolute dud?"

Oliver grew swiftly, wistfully grave.

"Don't you see? I want just once to give her what I'd like to give her all my life. It won't mean much to her, but it'll mean a lot to me—the chance to give her the best I can for one night—just once, and that's the end."

He crammed his broad hat well over his face, jumped into the car, and jammed on the starter. The roar of the Blunderbuss, as it plunged forward, drowned Jenks Jellicot's last feeble protests.

II

THE day appointed for Oliver's party found Jenks, with yearning eye and slightly drooling tongue, roving restlessly from golf course to poker table. The thought of the dinner, even now simmering in Franchesi's imported skillets, a pearl to be cast before Oliver, obsessed him. For distraction and comfort he turned the Blunderbuss toward the marble-pillared abode of Sylvia Larcom.

He found her curled upon a large silk *pouf* in a breezy window seat, and gazing, chin in hands, into the garden. As the butler ushered in what Jenks was beginning to feel must be his emaciated form, she jumped up, thrusting a wad of handkerchief under the *pouf*.

"Jenks, dear lamb, how nice to see you!" cried Miss Larcom, her voice like that of the early robin just after acquiring the worm.

Jenks pressed her hand fervently. He was too much engrossed with inner longings, and too much dazzled by the warm blue light of her eyes, to observe the dew upon their fringing lashes.

"I say, Sylvia, how wonderful you're

looking! May I sit down on that squushy thungummy, too?"

The window seat was comfortably small. Jenks, in an agreeable proximity to that flower-tilted profile, sighed with mingled yearnings.

"I say, Sylvia," he repeated impulsively, "you couldn't change your mind now, and have a go at it with me—getting married, I mean?"

"I'm afraid not, Jenksy, thank you," said Sylvia, with sweet regretfulness. "Awfully dear of you, but I just can't!"

"No, no, I suppose not," agreed Jenks resignedly. "I'm awfully fond of you, you know, Sylvia."

"I do know, old thing," replied Sylvia, squeezing his hand, with a forlorn echo of his sigh.

"I say," said Jenks again, suddenly startling the silence. "Has somebody else got his hooks in—I mean, is there another johnny?"

"No, of course not—oh, no!" denied Sylvia agitatedly.

She turned away, fumbling under the *pouf*. A tear dropped upon its ruffled silk with a small splash.

"Sylvia!" cried Jenks in panic. "Oh, gosh! Don't cry!"

The adoring concern in his small, pale eyes destroyed the last vestiges of her self-control. With a sob, her curly brown head collapsed against the adjacent tweed shoulder, and Jenks mopped distressedly at the deluge.

"I'm an idiot!" she gasped. "He doesn't care at all! I thought he did, at first. He was so—so—oh, you know! And then he got quite different—sort of stiff, and formal, and distant; and now he's going awa-a-ay!"

She subsided miserably, burying a small, cold nose in Jenks Jellicot's collar.

"What an ass! What a brute!" he thundered.

"Oh, no, he's wonderfully kind and gentle!" protested Sylvia, sitting up and pushing the brown tendrils out of her eyes. "Why, the very first time we met, I was too perfectly idiotic and insulting, and he was so dear and forgiving! You see"—she sniffed in unhappy recollection—"after we'd danced awhile, I asked what he did. 'I photograph stars,' he told me; and I said—oh, what a gushy goose he must have thought me!—I said, 'How exciting! Then do you know Pola Negri or Doug

Fairbanks?' And then he explained," she wailed, "that he's an astronomer!"

"An as—" Jenks gagged and goggled.

"Yes," nodded Sylvia. "I've read up the most dreadfully difficult stuff about planets and comets and things, and it's all no use. He's going awa-a-ay!"

"To Honduras," confirmed Jenks, his paralyzed brain beginning to function.

"You know him!" Sylvia's wide eyes dried up in her astonishment.

"Rather!" said Jenks warmly. "We're clubby enough to have been born twins. Look here—you must be the girl who's going to eat that dinner! Why, he's most awfully gone on you!"

"Oh, Jenks!" breathed Sylvia, gazing wonderstruck through wet lashes.

"Dead gone!" repeated Jenks solemnly. "He's ordered stuffed pheasant."

"But if—if he—cares," said Sylvia slowly, "why Honduras?"

"Because he's so frightfully keen on you that he can't stand hanging around," explained Jenks excitedly. "He said the girl had such a ghastly lot of cash—and you have, of course—that he'd sworn never to pop the question. He hasn't got a bent dime, you know."

"I don't care," said Sylvia, her tear-wet face luminous; "but oh, Jenksy, how can I ever make him ask me?"

Jenks rubbed a duplicated chin.

"I should think a poker would unbend after a dinner like to-night's," he suggested hopefully.

"It's my last chance to-night," whispered Sylvia tensely. "Perhaps if there's a moon, and we do something awfully romantic—what's he planning, Jenksy?"

"A bang-up party," Jenks told her impressively. "Dinner at Franchesi's—the center table—and then the snappiest revue in town."

"Oh, no!" wailed Sylvia. "How hopeless! All those lights, and people around—I'll never get anything out of him! Oh, if we could be alone with the stars!"

"There's going to be plovers' eggs," urged Jenks.

"What do I care for mere food," cried Sylvia passionately, jumping up to pace the room, "when he's going to Honduras to-morrow?"

"Say, there's nothing mere about *this* food," protested Jenks warmly.

"Jenksy!" Sylvia turned upon him, prayer in her gentian eyes, supplication in

her outspread hands. "Help me, dear old Jenksy! I want him so, and to-night's my only chance."

In the ringing pause there fell six delicate, chiming strokes from the French clock on the mantel.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Sylvia, suddenly practical. "It'll take me hours to dress—I've got to be scrumptious. Fly, Jenksy!"

"Dash it!" cried the distracted Jenks, as she pushed him from the room. "What can I do about it, Sylvia? He's a cross between a mule and a clam!"

"Well, wish me luck, anyway," she begged with a tragical smile.

"By George, I do!" vowed Jenks, clutching her hand in both of his. "He's an ass, but he's a prince; and you—oh, Sylvia!"

He lost his voice, and fled.

III

As she sat before her mirror, two hours later, putting on the last eloquent touches, Sylvia stared at the starry image there with a savage intensity. Fiercely she thrust in another hairpin, and pulled out a brown tendrill. The effect was already enough to wring pity for Oliver from the stoniest breast, but Sylvia mercilessly added a coronal of silver leaves.

From below came the roaring purr of a car pulling up. She ran to the window to see the big red roadster snuggle against the curb. Then she gathered her cloak and gloves and flew out of the room, her hands pressed to her hot cheeks.

Oliver, waiting in the hall below, saw descending from heaven down the wide stairs a slender, cool goddess, one hand trailing on the rail, the other gathering the blue velvet cloak about her with a queenly gesture. On the last step the remote, ineffable vision gave him her hand with a merry smile.

"How do you do? This is jolly!"

He summoned his reason from behind his masking impassivity, and smiled twistily.

"You're looking very super-extra in that blue affair!"

The big door clanged behind them, and the summer night welcomed them with dark, caressing airs. Sylvia climbed into the roadster and arranged herself.

"He's borrowed Jenks's car—that's good," she said to herself; "but oh, dear, Franchesi's! It's so frightfully gorgeous

and so horribly expensive! Of course the darling oughtn't!"

A motherly distress engulfed her, for Sylvia was no gold-digger.

"Careful, old boy, careful!" Oliver cautioned himself beneath his breath, as he swung in behind the wheel.

He dared not look at her, so that her smile fell upon stony ground. The gulf stretched between them illimitably where they sat side by side, and bleak depression settled upon each as they plunged into the night, chatting gayly.

"I've found out that Jenks Jellicot is a friend of yours," she began.

"Awfully good egg, Jenks!" he said warmly.

She dimpled.

"He's so amiable and eager to please," she remarked, "that he'll propose to any girl after their third dance!"

"Some day he'll find himself married," prophesied Oliver darkly.

"Well, every man ought to get married," said Sylvia reasonably.

The remark hung in the air. Then Oliver gulped, and said firmly:

"Well, I shan't marry."

"Really?"

Sylvia's tone showed impersonal interest.

"My job may take me around the world and up to the moon and back," went on Oliver. "A man must keep free to do his work. He must keep foot-loose—no home ties—free of responsibility—nothing to hold him down."

He enlarged brazenly out of pure bitterness of spirit.

"Do you know, I think you are quite right!"

Sylvia's voice was all confidential sympathy. Through the dark, her smile shone winsomely up from the snowy fur of her cloak. Passing headlights showed Oliver her poised head wreathed with silver leaves, the laurel crowning the head of a young goddess, untouched by mortal cares and sorrows.

Pressing the accelerator, he plunged the Blunderbuss into the night with the sensations of a man who has taken the cowl with irrevocable vows. They rode in silence, but for the dragon purring of the Blunderbuss and the whistling spirits of the air playing about their ears. Sylvia watched her escort's profile etched against flying shadows. He had discarded his hat, and the winds played riot with the curly black

thatch. His jaw, thrust forward, challenged the perils of the road, and his lips were thinned to a crooked line. The light glancing on his glasses struck out a baleful gleam. A profile stern and stubborn—how had she ever let it come to be so incredibly dear to her? She sighed miserably.

Oliver was aware of the sigh, as he was achingly aware with every inch of him of her presence at his side. He read boredom in it, and cursed himself for his stupidity. He knew he should toss off some bright and casual remark, but the flaming declaration that filled his mind held him speechless.

At least, he thought with relief, it wouldn't be so hard to be lightly indifferent across a sparkling dinner table. Lights, music, and surrounding chatter made effective barriers. Once at Franchesi's, he would get safely through the evening.

"There's a short cut here," he said abruptly. "Jenks showed it to me. Not much used, but good going."

She nodded mutely, and they swung off the main pike. Oliver doggedly held his mind to the carefully planned details ahead. If only the champagne was iced enough! Could that minx of a girl be trusted about the flowers?

Beside him, Sylvia clenched her hands and sought despairingly for means to disarm her beloved enemy.

Down the lonely road ahead shone the two blazing eyes of a motor, which, as they approached, appeared to be stationary.

"That fellow must be in trouble," commented Oliver.

"Oh, do let's see if we can help!" cried Sylvia sympathetically.

Oliver slowed down and drew up just short of the other car. The blaze of its headlights cut off all view of its occupants.

"Can I help you out, neighbor?" called Oliver genially.

Silence and the breathing of the Blunderbuss answered.

"Nobody in her. This looks funny!" said Oliver. "Well—"

He opened the door and jumped out.

"Now, then!" barked a hoarse voice. "Put up your hands!"

"I say—" Oliver blinked into the light.

"Stick 'em up!" The voice was rough. "Lady, get out of that car!"

Oliver had instinctively thrust up his hands before the unseen threat, but now he lunged forward.

"You let the lady be!"

A snarl broke out of the dark beyond the light, and Oliver felt a blunt muzzle against his ribs. He staggered back, to see looming upon him a figure in a mackintosh with the collar pulled well about his face.

"It's all right, Sylvia!" he called in a reassuring voice that choked. "Don't be frightened!"

"I'm not!"

She was beside him. His arm went around her, and the revolver covered them both.

"I've got 'em, Hank!" cried their captor, in a voice almost genial with triumph. "You keep mum, and you're safe enough," he informed his prisoners.

Prodding the small of Oliver's back with the revolver, he ushered them toward the car standing silent by the roadside—a mangy flivver, it dimly appeared. Behind them the Blunderbuss began to snort.

"Get in!" urged their captor, with grim pleasantness and a cordial gesture of the gun.

Oliver stood still, and Sylvia paused on the step, as the Blunderbuss came roaring alongside with the shadowy Hank at the wheel. The mackintosh man turned to spring on the running board, and in that instant Oliver leaped at him and caught his wrist. The revolver went off with a crash. Sylvia screamed and toppled forward into the tonneau. The bandit wrenched himself free and vanished in the roaring car.

"Sylvia!" cried Oliver in an agony of terror, plunging into the tonneau. "My God! Are you killed?" He had her limp body in his arms. "Sylvia, my darling love!" he sobbed against her hair.

She stiffened and moved. A small, quiet, happy voice came from somewhere in the white fox collar:

"I'm not hurt a bit!"

She lifted a dim face to him in the darkness. He turned away and put her down upon the cushions with shaking hands.

"Those brutes! Confound my stupidity! I ought never to have brought you this way! I ought never to have brought you at all! I—"

"Mr. Grant, please!" Sylvia quieted him. "I'm right as a trivet—whatever that is."

Her heart was singing. Oliver mopped his brow.

"Good Lord!" he groaned. "I wouldn't have had this happen for—"

Sylvia interrupted him with a puzzled question.

"But why didn't they rob us?"

"Auto thieves," Oliver told her briefly. "They ran this spavined hearse out here for a dummy, and then lay in wait for some sucker—"

"And we sucked," concluded Sylvia cheerfully.

"Poor Jenks!" reflected Oliver. "I hope he's got her insured, in case we can't trace her. I say"—he turned to Sylvia—"You were a heroine—an angel, and a heroine!"

"I think it was rather fun," she said frankly.

He pressed her hand in wordless admiration, and then dropped it. They sat staring into the cricket-threaded silence of the night. Oliver's cheek remembered the touch of her hair, and his throat ached with all that he had sworn not to say. In her corner Sylvia huddled contentedly.

Hauling himself back from dizzy chasms of imagination, Oliver made himself say briskly:

"Well, let's see how much life there is left in old Dobbin!"

He swung into the front seat and stepped on the self-starter. After a moment's unresponsive and pregnant silence, he abandoned it wordlessly, discovered the crank, and, fitting it in, swung it powerfully and vainly.

"Maybe I can patch her up," he said with wan hope.

She listened to him rattling the hood and whanging at the engine, and held her breath. Presently he reappeared beside her, a vaguely outlined head looking into the tonneau.

"It's no go, I'm afraid," he reported. "The feed pipe's gone, and there's no gas, anyway."

Sylvia gave a giggle of relief, but smothered it. Before Oliver's dazed eyes flashed a vision of the perfectly appointed table, the lights, the flowers, and himself authoritatively beckoning the head waiter. He gave a groan, and disguised it in a hastily improvised cough.

"It's a shame," offered Sylvia sympathetically. "Oooh, isn't it dark?"

Behind the vacant glare of the car lamps, wherein danced hypnotized moths and midges, velvet blackness infolded them. Dimly rose the darker shoulders of bushes and hedgerows along the road. The smell

of hay and dewy grass came to them, and the sharp sweetness of unseen wild roses.

Oliver could hear her soft breath, and could just see her parted lips. He jammed his hands into his pockets and hunched his shoulders into his coat collar.

"Would you be afraid," he asked gently, "if I went off to reconnoiter for help?"

"I love the dark," she declared. "Go along. I wish you luck!"

She snuggled back, uncrossing her fingers as he departed. Here on a dubious side road traversing quite unknown country, stalled in an unidentified car in the midst of dark and loneliness, she felt the greatest happiness and security she had ever known. She tucked her nose contentedly into the white fox. The evening was turning out well, after all!

IV

AFTER some minutes Sylvia heard dust-muffled footsteps.

"Oliver!" she called, softly, daringly, and waited.

A hand, clamped suddenly over her mouth, choked down a scream. She reeled back in the car, her starting eyes fixed upon the dark figure looming over her. There came the rustle of a mackintosh, and then a hissing "Shut up!" in a dearly familiar voice.

"Jenks!"

She clutched the mackintosh.

"For gosh sakes, don't gum the works!" he breathed.

Sylvia was giggling hysterically.

"It was you stole your own car! Oh, Jenksy, you darling duck!"

"Pipe down!" begged a worried whisper. "He may be here any minute. I've got to beat it. I'll give you two hours to do the job in—then you'll find me waiting by the bridge just below here."

He vanished, like a shade returning across the Styx.

In another moment Sylvia heard Oliver's quick footsteps.

"Not a house in sight," he reported, appearing beside the tonneau. "I could just grovel, Miss Larcom, I'm so disgusted with this ghastly flop!"

She slipped a comforting hand up his lapel.

"You mustn't mind." She lifted candid, dancing eyes, faintly luminous. "Honestly, I think it's a great lark!"

He moistened his lips.

"You brick!" he said softly, his eyes shining into hers in the dark.

"Of course," she said, with a quaint mockery of demureness, "it's dreadfully compromising!" With a low, delicious laugh, she added: "Really, Mr. Grant, you ought to marry me and make an honest woman of me!"

The wind tickled his cheek teasingly with a vagrant strand of her hair.

"Damn!" said Oliver under his breath, but nothing more.

Sylvia had the exasperating sensation of jerking up an empty line just after a big nibble.

"Damn!" she agreed softly.

He caught that, and turned quickly.

"What's wrong?" he asked anxiously.

"I'm awfully hungry!" she said with frank fervor.

"Hungry!" Oliver was all contrition. "You poor little—of course you're hungry! What an ass I am! What a brute—"

"How is it that trappers manage to get food in the wilds?" interrupted Sylvia.

"We can't set a trap, because we haven't any bait; and you've neglected to bring your shotgun."

"I shall pit my cunning against the brute strength of the wilderness," said Oliver darkly. "Isn't that the proper thing to do out in God's country where a man's a man?"

"The great open spaces," mused Sylvia pensively. "Oh, but I should love some hot coffee!"

"We'll capture some, dead or alive," he promised. "There's bound to be a village in the neighborhood, with an all-night lunch counter in it, and a railway station with a gum machine and penny scales that don't work, and hard slippery benches where we can luxuriate while waiting for a train; but I'll have to find out the direction of that paradise."

"I can hardly wait for the dead old chocolate we'll find in the slot machine," sighed Sylvia.

"Well," Oliver told her encouragingly, "there's something that looks like a railway tank up the road a bit. I'll be back in a shot."

And he was gone. Dewy night scents and the happy beating of her own heart kept her company till Oliver returned.

"It was a tank," he reported joyously; "and the hairy hermit in it says that we're between two main lines, and there isn't a

station for ten miles. This is just a little branch line, but there's a milk train that comes through here about one o'clock, and stops on signal."

"Goodness!" said Sylvia. "When will we ever get home?"

"Oh, some time still within the limits of decency," Oliver assured her. "That is, if they don't stop to milk the cows all along the way."

She giggled happily.

"He had one bad eye and villainous whiskers," said Oliver, "but a heart of gold, had that switchman. Behold!"

With a flourish, he drew from behind him a frying pan and a tin coffeepot.

"Empty!" He shook it regretfully.

"He had no grub, but for lending us these he'll get past St. Peter, whatever he's done."

"Where will you get anything to cook in them?" inquired Sylvia.

"He says there's a farm across the meadow."

Oliver pointed into the shadowy unknown. Sylvia promptly jumped out, thrust an arm through his, and together they set off over the stubble, pot and pan jangling hopefully. To Oliver the hunter, hot upon the trail, Franchesi's art was nothing. Sylvia's silver slippers tripped happily, keeping pace with his masterful stride. From a wide, veiled sky, dim stars looked down like wise old eyes that watched, laughing.

No light shone from the farm, and the white gate was barred. Oliver swung Sylvia lightly over, and then vaulted it with long legs flying. From a ghostly kennel came a rattle of chains. Sylvia screamed faintly as a huge mongrel, shaking himself, rose and rushed toward them. At the length of his tether he stopped, wagging his tail and whining gently.

"Did it was a poor old doggums?"

Oliver caressed the great head and turned back to the palpitating Sylvia; but a plaintive whine followed him, and threatened to rise into a howl.

"Didn't um like to left to ums lonesome?" said Oliver, as he returned and un-snapped the chain.

With their bounding, lumbering escort they picked their way toward the barnyard, led by the smell of cattle and of hay.

"Ah, ha!" whispered Oliver. "That's a hen roost. Wait here, and hold Oscar's paw to keep him happy."

He disappeared into the shadows, and Sylvia held on to the collar of the tugging dog. A cackling and a panicky flutter sounded from uncharted darkness, quickly muffled by a closing door.

"S-s-st!" came Oliver's whisper. "Better make our get-away quick. They may set the dicks on us!"

He appeared beside her in the dim starlight, somewhat ruffled, bearing in his inverted hat four eggs, and led the way around the corner of a shed toward a barn that stood a little way off in the field. In the lee of the barn he stopped.

"Here we are at home," he said. He pulled off the duster that covered his evening clothes, and spread it for her to sit upon. "Hold these!"

He dumped the eggs in her lap, and disappeared. Oscar settled contentedly upon the coat. Sylvia curled up beside him, her feet tucked under her, and waited in serene trust.

It was many minutes before Oliver dropped down beside her. He set the pot down carefully with one hand, and with the other the frying pan, holding a lump of butter and a chunk of bread. Sylvia applauded hungrily. From under his arm Oliver produced a bundle of sticks and a bunch of hay. Moving aside, he laid them quickly and struck a match. The hay flared and the sticks crackled.

"You're better than a jinni out of a pot!" cried Sylvia delightedly.

Oliver had opened a jackknife and attacked the bread.

"Rather hunky slices," he commented, handing her the knife and the butter.

She sat up on her heels and happily decorated the irregular surfaces. The fire crackled, holding at bay the shadows that crowded just outside their tent of light and warmth. The pot was already on the flames, and Oliver disappeared again into the night, murmuring:

"More fuel!"

Sylvia unfolded her handkerchief, spread it on the duster, and tastefully arranged the jackknife beside it. Then she sat back, hugging her knees joyfully, and waited.

"Better than a thousand dinners at Franchesi's," she murmured. "Oh, Oliver, you dear dunce!" She tweaked the ear of the slumbering Oscar, and addressed him severely. "Your master is late again to dinner. You know cook will be cross if the soufflé is spoiled!"

Out of the night Oliver appeared at his fire, and bent to build it up. In the leaping light she watched man at his primitive business, oblivious of unessential woman. He melted the butter in the pan and dexterously broke in the eggs.

"Where did you learn that?" Sylvia admired.

"Frying my breakfast over the gas jet, I guess," he grinned, busy with the sizzling pan.

A gas jet!

"Poor darling!" reflected Sylvia. "But I wouldn't mind even that!"

Oscar rose, and, lumbering to Oliver, rested an inquiring nose upon his shoulder. Reaching with a long arm for the bread, with the other hand Oliver flipped the eggs thereon and clapped the slices together. He hooked the pot on a couple of fingers, and joined Sylvia.

"Fried egg sandwiches," he elucidated, holding one forth upon the palm of his hand as one offers sugar to a horse. "Or call it stuffed pheasant with hearts of palm salad," he added ruefully.

"That couldn't taste like this!" She had taken her share trustingly, and spoke through a large mouthful.

Oliver sighed, and sank upon the duster opposite her. She borrowed the tablecloth to wipe her lips primly.

"And did you have a hard day at the office, dear?" she asked in a sedate voice. "What do we do for cups?" she added *sotto voce*, lifting the coffee-pot.

Oliver laughed adoringly.

"I didn't dare try for cups," he told her. "We'll have to share it, like a wassail. There's sugar in it, though."

She sipped a hot draft and passed it across to him. He tossed a scrap to the yearning Oscar.

"Oliver!" she said severely. He jumped. "You know you mustn't feed the dog at the table!"

Oliver tried to look ashamed, but from sheer reckless happiness his histrionic abilities failed in a grin. She held up the pot.

"More coffee, my dear?"

Her tone was the very acme of marital propriety.

"Yes'm. I mean no, thank you—dear!"

She just didn't choke on the last of her sandwich, and hid her dancing eyes in the tilted pot. Then she wiped her fingers, cupped her chin in her hands, and looked across at an enchanted Oliver with his

glasses gleaming and his hair tumbled on a flushed brow.

"How did you do it?" she demanded.

"This?" He waved a hand at the ghost of their supper. "Sneaked in at the pantry window. Nobody ever remembers to lock pantry windows."

"And stole it?"

Her voice was awed.

"No," said Oliver doubtfully, "not stole it—I borrowed it. That's more neighborly, don't you think?"

"It sounds better," she said uncertainly.

"I'll tell you—we'll pay for it," declared Oliver. "Now let's see—eggs are how much?"

"Awfully much," Sylvia told him vaguely. "I don't know just what, but they're always going up, I believe."

"What shall we pay for the four we copped?"

"A dollar. They were nice and fresh," she decreed.

He took a pencil and a torn envelope from his dinner jacket, and carefully noted the item.

"Five cents for bread, and say a quarter for the butter," he estimated. She nodded and he put them down. "Was there anything else?"

"The coffee," she reminded him. "Call that ten cents."

Oliver remembered that the dregs left in his wallet after paying Franchesi amounted to three dollars and thirty-nine cents. There was still the fare home on the milk train to be paid, but two dollars would surely cover it. He looked doubtful.

"I don't think we can quite afford ten cents' worth of coffee."

With a worried pucker of her brows she hunched over beside him on the rug, to scan the figures.

"We mustn't be extravagant," she agreed gravely. "Do you think we might pay nine cents?"

He wrote it down and added up the column.

"One dollar and thirty-nine cents," he announced.

She checked it up over his shoulder. They looked at each other and laughed happily.

"Lots of men have bought me dinners," she told him; "but none of them ever cooked me one—much less stole it!"

Her tone was balm, and all forgotten was Franchesi's forsaken masterpiece.

"You may smoke while I wash the dishes," she said demurely; "but don't drop ashes on my carpet."

He lit his pipe, and, lying on his back, with his hands behind his head, watched her through smoke rings that aspired to the stars and vanished, as she wiped the pot and pan clean with wisps of grass.

Oscar snored. Here in the dewy night field was the warm heart of life. Around the magic circle of firelight lay the wide world and all, but the glowing phantom walls held all that two companioned hearts desired.

V

WHEN Oliver's pipe was smoked, he knocked it out and rose with grim determination. He steeled his voice to break the spell.

"Well, the party's over," he said with harsh heartiness. "Now I've got to pay the bill!"

Sylvia nodded, speechless, her eyes suddenly stinging with tears of disappointment and exasperation. Oliver stalked off without a backward look, Oscar gamboling beside him. Sylvia's head went down on her knees. She clenched her hands and fought back despair.

"Perhaps he doesn't really care at all," she thought, shivering. "Perhaps Jenks was quite, quite wrong!"

Minutes passed while she sat engulfed in black misery. Hearing his step, she jumped up.

"The fire's gone out," she said in a dead little voice.

They stood apart, staring at the ashes.

"Rather ghostly," remarked Oliver in a voice of hollow cheer. "We've still got some time to wait. Let's try the barn."

She went ahead, and he plowed after her miserably, trailing the duster.

The barn gave forth a gentle welcome as they entered, in the scent of hay, and the warmth and breathing of the animals.

"That's a whale of a loft," commented Oliver, looking up the ladder. He glanced down at her, a drooping little figure infolded limply in the crumpled velvet cloak. "You're tired," he said gently. "I'll spread this coat up in the hay, and you can catch a bit of a nap. I'll keep watch."

She nodded without looking at him.

"Just a jiffy!"

He ran up the ladder, spread the duster, and swung down again. Slowly she pulled

herself up, and sank down in the kind, infolding darkness, in the dusty, sweet smell of the hay. She pillowed her hot cheek in the crook of her arm, and hid her eyes from even the dark.

From the wide barn doorway Oliver watched the stars, those old companions of his loneliness, and hated them. They winked down coldly and mockingly. An eclipse of the sun! He laughed wryly to think how soon and how total, for him, would be the eclipse of his bright sun.

"I'm not asleep," remarked a small voice from the hayloft.

His heart leaped to it, but he kept himself leaning against the door frame.

"Just rest," he soothed her. "It's getting near one o'clock, but I'm keeping my eye on my watch."

There was silence, and in one of the stalls a horse stamped. The hay rustled.

The voice came a little nearer.

"When are you going to come back from Honduras?"

Oliver stifled a groan.

"I'm never going to come back here, Sylvia," he said clearly.

The silence echoed emptily, and then Sylvia swung her feet over the edge of the loft and looked down, her face a dim, pale oval.

"Oliver," she said in a tone to match his own, "why have you decided to go to Honduras?"

He turned and answered her squarely:

"Because I can't have what I want."

"Have you ever tried to get it?" she challenged.

"No, and I never will. I'm too beggarly poor."

She caught her breath in a sob that was also a cry of exasperation.

"I'm not a silly flapper!" she protested passionately. "I could learn things—I *could*!"

They had elided large tracts of argument, yet both knew where they stood. They stared through the dark.

"It's nearly one o'clock," he broke off abruptly. "Time to start for home!"

"I don't want to go home," she said hotly.

"Don't want to go home—"

"No—I want to go to Honduras."

Oliver crumpled against the door frame. To have to fight Sylvia as well as himself was the climax of cruelty ordained by the treacherous stars.

"Come down," he urged, postponing argument in the face of necessity. "It's two minutes to one—we'll have to run!"

"No, Oliver, I won't come down," said Sylvia fiercely.

"Come down, darling! Please come down," he pleaded, with a frantic glance at his watch.

"Did you mean that, Oliver?" she asked implacably.

"What?"

She paused.

"Darling," she brought out.

"My God, yes!" said Oliver forcefully. "Will you come down?"

"I don't care if I never get home," Sylvia's voice rang. "I won't come down unless you'll take me to Honduras!"

"I won't do that!" His stubbornness was iron. A far-off toot echoed through the still night. "There's the train whistle," said Oliver desperately. "Will you or won't you come down?"

"I won't," answered Sylvia through tight lips. "Not unless you promise to take me to Honduras!"

Through the silence came the long, low rumble of the approaching train. Oliver stepped to the foot of the ladder. Across his mind flashed an irrelevant picture of a bunch of withered orchids lying beside an untouched plate. He laughed a low, triumphant laugh.

"Very well!" He spoke in a voice she had never heard—a voice of steel and fire. "I'll take you to Honduras, and, by Heaven, I'll never let you get away again! Now come down this instant!"

But Sylvia had withdrawn into the darkness, and from the loft came only a rustle, and then, breathlessly:

"I'm afraid to, now!"

"All right!" he said grimly. "I'll come up and carry you down!"

He leaped up the ladder rungs. The drowsing horses heard a faint squeal, and then a long and freighted silence. Suddenly the night was rent with a shriek and a rumbling roar, as the one-o'clock train rushed by.

They found the patient Blunderbuss waiting by the bridge. Its beacon lights were bent staringly upon them as they approached, Sylvia's waist surrounded by a flagrant arm. Out of the car came a feminine squeal and a masculine whoop, and Jenks, a Billiken god out of the machine,

was upon them, pounding Oliver's back and pumping Sylvia's hand.

"Jenks, you old horse thief," gurgled Oliver happily, "you ought to be hanged! You ought to be decorated, too! I'd give you anything in the world, I'm so dog-gone grateful!"

"Ollie," said Jenks solemnly, "there

isn't a thing in life left to wish for—not after that pheasant and those truffles. You see, Marietta and I have been over at Franchesi's, eating up your dinner."

"My stars, *what* a dinner!" called Miss Maguire ecstatically from the car.

"Wasn't it?" echoed Oliver and Sylvia together, lost in each other's eyes.

Sheer Luck

TELLING HOW A MALICIOUS WOMAN FOUND THAT THE MOST
SUBTLE SOCIAL ATTACK MAY RECOIL UPON ITS AUTHOR

By Margaret Busbee Shipp

"**M**RS. LOCKE, may I introduce Mr. Ayres and leave him with you?

I've just had a telephone call, and must dash back to town. I've told him that you are so delightfully determined that everybody shall have a good time that we'd adore you even if you weren't the mother of the belle of our village!"

Two high spots of color burned in Mrs. Locke's cheeks. It was the first Country Club dance of the season, and what she had to do must be begun that night. She needed all her power of concentration, and here was this stranger thrust upon her!

She offered to introduce Ayres to the girls, but he declined, saying that he had wrenched his ankle the day before and was unable to dance. To Mrs. Locke's question as to whether he was making a long stay, he replied that he was going back to California the following day.

Then, for a final probe, Mrs. Locke asked if he was staying at the new hotel. The young man, who had made his answers with characteristic brevity, expanded somewhat. His smile was distinctly attractive as he said:

"Oh, no—Mrs. Middleham would never consent to that!"

Then, gently but inexorably, Mrs. Locke dropped him. True, the stranger continued to occupy a chair at her left, but she managed to convey the impression of the yawning, vacant chair on her right. For Mrs.

Locke knew no Mrs. Middleham, and in a Southern town of twenty thousand inhabitants one knew everybody worth knowing. She could not waste time on a guest of unknown people. She threw him a few words occasionally, and wondered impatiently why he did not go and sit somewhere else.

As a matter of fact, it was when Mrs. Locke ceased talking to Benton Ayres that she began to interest him. The first thing that puzzled him was when she made a beckoning movement with her fan to bring to her side a roly-poly young man with an incessant grin. This youth's nickname, Custard Pie, generally shortened to Cust, had been given him long since because of his resemblance to the innocent bystander in a comic reel who always gets the custard pie in his face.

"Promise me something, Cust! Do ask Anne Meade to the next Country Club dance! It would be a shame if the dear child were not invited, after the lovely debut party to which all you selfish men went."

"Sure!" Cust was distinctly elated at being chosen as squire of dames. "I'll ask her to-night."

"Why not break in on this dance and ask her now?" suggested Mrs. Locke.

Though Mrs. Locke had lowered her voice, she had to speak clearly enough to be heard above the blare of a jazz orchestra, and Ayres's sense of hearing was acute.

He looked to see which girl Cust was

sent to rescue, and it happened that she was quite near him when the roly-poly youth broke in on her dance. She was chatting gayly with her partner, and they both seemed to be having a very good time. Her expression, which was as open as a child's, showed a slight cloud of disappointment when her partner, who was one of the best dancers on the floor, had to surrender her to Cust, who was easily the worst.

"Just why did Mrs. Locke do that?" speculated Ayres.

He looked so unaware of it all, however, that Mrs. Locke gave small thought to him as she went ahead with the work she was to do. To-night she must plant the seeds skillfully and quietly; the rest would be merely a matter of growth and patience.

A young man would drop into the vacant seat, be rallied about his popularity, his luck at cards, his girls, his golf, or whatever happened to flatter him most, and then there would be the anxious request:

"Do me a favor, won't you? Go dance with Anne, there's a dear boy! She's such a superior girl that I'm afraid you men don't appreciate her."

"Why, I thought she was having an awfully good time to-night!"

"She is," Mrs. Locke would reply meaningly. "I am seeing to it. Now, dance with her, and I'll promise you won't get stuck. I'll send somebody else along soon."

To a palpably dull fellow the comment varied:

"So glad to see you dancing with that sweet bookworm cousin of mine! Anne doesn't frighten you? Clare says that people who are crammed with facts scare her to death."

"That's why Clare has the drop on every other girl in this little old burg," replied the young man. "She's pretty as a peach, never puts on airs, and is full of pep. I think college ruins a girl."

"You ought to hear how eloquently Anne disagrees with you," smiled Mrs. Locke. "Men who haven't been to college bore her, she says."

On Littebrant the attack was subtler. He had been dancing with Anne oftener than with any one else. When he came up, rather tardily, to speak to Mrs. Locke, she greeted him with effusive cordiality:

"Thank you so much for giving Anne such a perfectly lovely time!"

Littebrant, who did not like Mrs. Locke, was unresponsive to her gratitude.

"Anne's a corking dancer," he said. "I'm sorry Cust cut in ahead of me for the next Country Club dance."

Mrs. Locke clasped her hands eagerly together, and suggested that he might ask Anne for the dance following that one.

Now that was just what Littebrant had planned to do, but somehow he disliked to follow other people's suggestions, especially Mrs. Locke's.

"Should be delighted, but I can't tell that far ahead whether I'll be in town."

The forgotten young man on the other side of the officious lady felt a shiver of repulsion at the malicious gleam of triumph in her eyes. He rose to say good night.

"Good-by, Mr.—" Mrs. Locke returned indifferently.

She had forgotten the name of Mrs. Middleham's guest.

Hers had been a successful evening, but the next day she realized that there was one score she had failed to make. Her husband, a fussy little man who was perpetually hampered by lack of money for his wife's social demands, came to lunch in high good humor.

"I heard that old Benton's nephew stuck to you all evening. Glad he liked you, Stella! He's going to California to settle up his affairs, and then he's coming back to Yarborough to live. Benton will turn over his affairs to him gradually, as he's the only heir—son of the invalid sister who died in California a year ago. The son had some postgraduate work to finish, I believe. Glad you made friends with him, Stella!"

Mrs. Locke bit her lips. They tasted dusty.

"He spoke of Mrs. Middleham. Who is she?"

"Benton's old housekeeper. She always sits three seats back of you in church—wears funny pork pie bonnets—don't you remember?"

"I—I never seem to have noticed her," replied Mrs. Locke.

II

MORE than once, on the journey to California, Benton Ayres's thoughts reverted to Anne.

"I wonder what that hypocrite was up to, deliberately going to work to make men dislike that girl! She had such nice eyes, too, laughing and gray and candid."

The thought recurred.

"Gray, with a dash of hazel, and frank as a child's. That purring cat sticking her claws in her 'sweet bookworm cousin'—curious!"

The amazing part of it all, even to Mrs. Locke, was that the victory proved so easy. Anne had assured position, a buoyant nature, and a friendly heart, yet it had been in Stella Locke's power to make or break her. The old grudge would be paid with the accumulated interest of the years—a grudge the more merciless because Helen Meade, Anne's mother, had never remotely suspected that it existed.

Mrs. Locke and Mrs. Meade were second cousins, and Stella, being left an orphan in her girlhood, had been taken to Helen's home and brought up there. It was not the fact that she would have been penniless except for this protection which remained in Stella Locke's mind to-day, but the old bitterness that the dignified home *belonged* to the daughter of the house, and that she herself was there only through kindness.

Above all things she had wanted to marry John Meade. When he fell in love with Helen, Stella determined to marry first, even if it were fussy Ed Locke. She never gave a backward thought of gratitude for her trousseau, or for the silver and the substantial check that she received. Instead, the Meades had been a thorn in the flesh to her—or, rather, a mental cancer. Their summer place in the mountains, their handsome home, everything they possessed which was better than hers, aroused her envy.

Now the triumph which she had foreseen was actually hers, for gay little Clare Locke was the acknowledged belle of Yarborough, and the Locke home was the rendezvous of the younger set. Mr. and Mrs. Meade belonged to a somewhat exclusive circle. They hardly knew the young people, and Anne, with four years in college and the vacations spent at their summer home, had been in Yarborough, during several years, only for the brief Christmas holidays.

Before long Mrs. Meade was brought sharply against the developing situation. She talked it over with her husband:

"The part which makes it so hard for the dear child is that she had looked forward rapturously to coming home and taking up the threads of her old life here. It isn't the girls—they are always running in; but the young men seem to be actually afraid of Anne. If they have to pay a

dinner call, they fortify themselves by coming in groups. If there's a party, she's put with that smirking little creature they call Cust, and his manner to her has become insufferably patronizing. I thought Anne would like a Christmas dance, and I had ordered ices and favors and decorations, but she asked me this morning please not to have it, and burst out crying."

"Anne!" was all Meade could ejaculate helplessly. "Those damned insects making Anne cry!"

"Frank Littebrant was quite attentive to her at first, and Anne says he almost runs if he sees her coming. It's the most inexplicable thing!"

Mrs. Locke had seen to it that Littebrant had been assigned to Anne for three successive dances, when the girls had been at her house consulting her about their lists. Littebrant was engaged to a girl in a neighboring town, and, though he liked Anne, he did not wish to be classed as a suitor of hers; so after that enforced rush he thought it prudent to avoid any more engagements with her.

"I'm afraid it's all my fault," sighed Mrs. Meade. "We've been so happy leading our own lives that we've let ourselves get out of touch with the young people here. Anne had a letter to-day from Nelly Leigh—her roommate at Smith, you know. The brave little thing is going to open a tea shop at Sand Hills, and she wants Anne to come down—to stiffen her resolution," she says. Anne wishes to go, but I can't bear to have my child leave home because she isn't happy here. I think I'll talk things over with Stella."

She called up Mrs. Locke on the telephone, to find out if she was free. Mrs. Locke's face was gleaming as she hung up the receiver. At last the petted "daughter of the house" where she had been the poor relation—Helen, who had married John Meade, Helen, who owned a big expensive car where she had a cheap roadster—was coming to beg her help!

When Mrs. Meade came into the living room, with its look of careless comfort, Clare was curled up on the couch like a lazy kitten.

"She's tired out from last night's frolic," explained her mother indulgently.

Anne's mother did not know what was referred to, as her own daughter had played three-handed bridge with her parents until half past ten.

The desk telephone tinkled. Clare, rubbing her eyes sleepily, took the receiver.

"That you, Skinny?"

"I'll say it was—finest little time ever, and oh, that last Charleston!"

"Oh, boy, but you're the silver-tongued spieler! I'm dreadfully sorry, but I've an engagement."

"Sorry, but I've promised that to Harry. Let me see—there's that crazy party to-night, Ned's party to-morrow night, the Country Club dance Thursday, and Meg's dinner Friday. Saturday there's the amateur vaudeville, and we're going to sit in boxes and send a clothes basket full of artificial flowers from our old hats to Jinksy after his dance. Sunday we're going to motor to the river and have lunch out of doors and freeze to death. You're coming, sure? You won't let me die outside all by my little lonesome?"

"Yes, Monday—I can give you Monday night for anything that turns up."

"Look forward to it? I'll say I do!"

She turned to her mother, laughing, pretty as a pink hollyhock.

"Isn't he the clam's eyebrows? I'll toddle along and wash my hair now. By-by, Cousin Helen!"

But the conversation over the telephone, which had been as nectar to Mrs. Locke, had been too informing to Mrs. Meade. Something had grown rigid within her. Of the invitations that crowded Clare's calendar, her Anne had received only the one to Meg's dinner, and for that she was assigned to Cust as an escort.

No, she would never consult with Stella Locke. It had been her anxiety and bewilderment about her child's happiness that had made the thought possible.

"What was it you wanted to talk to me about, dear?" urged Mrs. Locke. "It's like the old days when we were girls, isn't it?"

"I had ordered everything for a dance on Wednesday fortnight, and, as Anne has decided to go to Sand Hills, I'm wondering if Clare can use it. I should be so glad to give it all to her."

For a moment Mrs. Locke felt as if she had been slapped in the face. She wanted to glimpse the troubled, aching heart of Helen Meade, and instead her cousin was still playing the rich relation and donating ice cream! Then her habitual canniness reasserted itself.

"Why, Helen, how thoughtful!" she

said. "Clare was saying yesterday that she ought to entertain, she has so many social debts. Too bad dear Anne won't be here!"

When she said good-by to her visitor, she ground her teeth with disappointment. She did not know that it was Clare who had settled Anne's departure.

III

THE day after Christmas Anne went to Sand Hills, a winter resort in the long-leaved pine region of the State, where the sandy soil and surrounding hills made a winter playground which attracted thousands of pleasure seekers in search of mid-winter golf.

The death of Nelly Leigh's father during her senior year at Smith had made it a difficult problem for her younger sister to go to college. Nelly, whose spirit was tougher than her five feet three, determined to make the money herself. Her father had built a quaint log cabin in Sand Hills as an investment, but it had proved to be too far from the hotels to command a good rental. It was Nelly's idea that its location at the juncture of the two best roads made it an ideal place for a tea shop.

"With all these rich Northern people here, one must do something audacious to attract attention," Nelly explained to Anne, as she displayed the sign she had painted for the door.

Under a canopy of cloud-flecked sky was the inscription:

ZENITH TEA SHOP

HIGH PRICES ONLY—THE SKY'S THE LIMIT

"Mother says it's common," Nelly giggled like a naughty child, "and she says for me to serve people at the table is common; but I'm going to do it in an uncommon way."

"Dear children, suppose some ill bred stranger should offer you a tip?" suggested Mrs. Leigh dismally.

Nelly produced a decorated tin box with a slit in it.

"I'll tell him that while no gratuities are accepted by the house, we are always happy to receive contributions for the County Tubercular Hospital."

The new enterprise was launched on New Year's Day. The big living room of the cabin, which had been metamorphosed into a fascinating tea room, was crowded all the

afternoon. When it was over, the two tired girls took stock rather soberly.

"All the beaten biscuit gone, and the cinnamon toast, and most of the hermits, but the hot buttered corn meal muffins were a dead loss. Only two people took them, and mammy had made up so much batter that we shall have to live on battercakes and muffins ourselves until it's eaten up!"

"The worst failure was the nut fudge I made," Anne said penitently. "I used all those pecans in it, and nobody bought it until I sold it out at cost."

On the following day a woman came in and wanted to buy five pounds of the same nut fudge—no, she couldn't give an order, she wanted to take it with her that very moment and her car was waiting and she was in a great hurry, and it was very strange indeed that one day there was homemade candy and the next day there wasn't, and she would tell them in all kindness that it was no way to run a tea shop, and unless one could count *pos-i-tive-ly* on finding what one wanted people would naturally go elsewhere, and her car was waiting and she had come out of her way to buy that fudge and there wasn't any, and in all kindness and hoping they would appreciate, because nobody liked to say disagreeable things, but she was always interested in working girls, that was no way to run a tea shop.

At the end of the first week, Anne knew that Nelly was speaking the simple truth when she said:

"Anne, I didn't realize what I was doing when I begged you to come. Don't you see that I couldn't do it without you? When you and I are joking over the ups and downs, mother sees it as a lark; but if I were here alone, she would feel that every woman who criticized was inconsiderate, and every man who was a little fresh had insulted me. I couldn't run the shop and keep my belovedest mother pacified at the same time; but with you slaving away at my side, it's all fun, and we're making it go, Nancy lamb—we're making it *go*! Mammy is the world's eighth wonder as a cook, isn't she?"

The only other servant was mammy's small granddaughter, who was in her glory during the hours of afternoon tea, as she sped back and forth with supplies of beaten biscuit, Sally Lunn, or cinnamon toast.

In the early morning the girls always had tennis or canoeing before they commenced

to make sandwiches for the afternoon, while Mrs. Leigh would concoct a Lady Baltimore cake or a "devil's food" fit for angels.

A month raced by and the Zenith was more than a success. It was "the thing to do" to drop in for tea. Tables were reserved days in advance.

One day Anne saw an old friend at the door, and hurried forward to greet him.

"Why, Mr. Benton, how delighted I am to see you! I suppose the golf enticed you here?"

"I wanted Bent to see the Sand Hills country, so he wouldn't think California had a monopoly on sunshine. He's just back from there." The old gentleman introduced his nephew, Benton Ayres, and asked: "Won't you have tea with us, my dear?"

"No, thank you, but I'll bring it to you." She put out a friendly hand to Ayres. "I'm so glad you have come to be with Mr. Benton, but I warn you that he's hard to manage and easy to mind!"

"Nice child that—pluck and initiative! She worked under me when I was chairman of the last Red Cross drive," said Mr. Benton, as Anne went to bring their tea. "Why in Sam Hill is she working in a tea shop? Some of these newfangled notions of woman's independence, I suppose; but I should think John Meade would oppose it."

Ayres had recognized her at once—the clear gray eyes, black-lashed, and as honest as a child's. He recalled Mrs. Locke's "sweet bookworm cousin," and determined to solve the riddle.

He found it agreeable to drop in every afternoon at the tea shop after a round of the links. He saw the two girls at their best—wholly without self-consciousness, with their minds concentrated on doing their work well and making an atmosphere of hospitality for their patrons.

"I'm glad you and Anne had good tennis this morning," said Nelly one day to Ayres. "I do wish she would take more time to play. Did you ever see such a wonderful friend as Anne? She has worked with all her might and put her whole heart into my problems, until I have such a perfectly gorgeous balance in the bank that when any one speaks of profiteering I think they're talking scandal about me!"

Ayres thought it very fine, too. He said as much to Anne the next time they found themselves alone. A quick, shamed color

raced over her face. She hesitated, and then her inherent honesty got the better of her reticence.

"I can't let you praise me for something I don't deserve. Of course, it has been a joy to help Nelly; but—but I wasn't giving up anything, or surrendering anything I liked better. I was having a horrid time at home."

He said nothing, but the sympathy in his face was the look which had comforted his invalid mother. Anne's lips quivered slightly.

"I—I didn't expect it," she went on. "I didn't understand it. Suddenly nobody seemed to like me. I was left out of things. I was always hearing of something I had said which I had never dreamed of saying—that 'Yarborough was a dear provincial place and its people so quaintly parochial,' or that I 'was bored to death by men who hadn't been to college,' or that 'dancing was an amazing waste of time in a world where there were worth while things to do.' I denied, at first, but I was always hearing something new—some smug, priggish remark which I had never made in my life. Why, I think smugness should be one of the seven deadly sins! I wouldn't bother mother with it when silly lies were repeated as 'Anne Meade's latest,' but I felt as if I were being stung to death by gnats. In the end, I just ran away, and I was thankful I had Nelly to run to!"

"What do you want to do now, Anne?" he asked gently.

"I want to go home and be contented there—if not in one way, then in another." She lifted her head proudly. "I'm not going to let myself be miserable in the dear place in which I was born because the men there don't happen to like me. To be happy is the only decent thing. It wouldn't fool mother or dad a moment for me to pretend it. I'm going to be happy!"

"Let me help! Of all the things in this world, the one I want most is that you shall be happy, Anne dear!"

"You can help me to find my foothold," she answered.

IV

WHEN Anne returned to Yarborough, a month later, she was rejoiced over Nelly's good fortune. As the tea shop was an established success, the hotel company offered to buy it for a good price. Then an individual made a better offer, and with the two

bidding against each other, Nelly sold cabin, fixtures, and good will for a figure which, plus the season's profits, made her sister's college course assured.

The Anne who came back was not the girl who went away. She had gone away bewildered and defeated; she came back radiant in health and spirits.

Meg ran in the first day to welcome her home and to tell her the news.

"Mr. Benton's nephew has come from California, Anne. The first thing he did was to have the courts at Mr. Benton's put in condition, and we're having the most wonderful tennis parties there. He's keen about golf, too, and Mr. Benton has given lots of money to the Country Club to improve the links."

"Doesn't Mr. Ayres do any work at all?" Anne demanded.

Her voice sounded disappointed.

"Oh, he has a position in the bank. When old Mr. Benton retires as president, Bent will succeed him in the course of time, daddy says, as Mr. Benton owns a majority of the stock—or the shares, or maybe it was the directors. Benton Ayres thinks it's necessary for a man who works in an office to have strenuous daily exercise, and everybody's limp trying to keep up with him. He has a nice sort of manner, a little shy, but all the men seem to like him. He's funny about girls—seems to prefer us in groups. Nobody has an idea which one he likes the best."

They soon learned, for after Anne's return his preference was plain to all the world.

Outdoor sports were the rage that spring, and the younger set turned enthusiastically to tennis, golf, and swimming. These were the sports in which Anne delighted. Gone was her sense of that curious, pervasive exclusion. She took her rightful place as "one of the crowd." It was easy to include her in the smallest party when Ayres was eager to be her escort, and inviting Anne did not mean spoiling a party by including a conceited bore like Cust.

Mrs. Locke was silenced by the amazing turn of affairs. Her husband worked in the Power and Light Company, of which Mr. Benton was a director. If Anne Meade was to marry his nephew, then Anne became a person to be propitiated. She made tentative efforts to throw Anne and Clare together, to which Anne was lukewarm because of the dissimilarity of their tastes.

Ayres never hinted his knowledge to Anne, for he did not want her to have any self-consciousness where the Lockes were concerned, and her attitude of pleasant, unaware indifference suited him exactly. In the end he was rewarded by seeing just what he wanted most—a radiantly happy girl enjoying to the full all the natural pleasures of girlhood.

The week before the Meades left for their summer home he felt he had earned the right to say what was in his heart:

"I've tried hard to be silent and let you play around a little while before I teased you for a promise; but you know how much I love you, Anne!"

Her sweet, fearless eyes looked straight into his.

"Yes, I think I do. It's in your voice when you speak to me—your dear voice!"

Whereupon Anne learned a scientific fact omitted from her course in botany—that in all the world there's no place so harmonious for a first kiss as a rose garden in June!

It was decidedly later when he pleaded:

"Anne, dear, I've been as patient a lover as Jacob. He served seven years, I know,

but time goes so much faster nowadays! Will you marry me this summer? Think how beautiful it would be to have our wedding at your home in the hills, with only those about us who love us the most. Then we can run away in the roadster and take to the open road together. Does it appeal to you, darling?"

Evidently she liked the picture, for there came a day when Mrs. Locke took the morning paper to her room, wishing to be alone when she read the account of the wedding. Her face was somber.

"Nobody can do anything against sheer luck," she thought bitterly, "no matter how they work and plan. If I hadn't succeeded in making Anne unpopular, her mother would never have permitted her to work in that idiotic tea shop her first winter at home, and she wouldn't have had the chance to land the most eligible bachelor in town before he met any of the other girls. And there's Mr. Benton as pleased as an old grinning *Punch*, and giving them a home of their own for a wedding present! Helen always had her way, and now Anne's having hers. One can't fight sheer luck!"

HOME CHRISTMAS

It's Christmas time again, oh!

But I'm not very gay,

Because I can't go home to you,

And it's a lonely day!

I want to go back home and feel

The frosty, morning air;

I want to see the shingled barns,

All creaky, warped, and bare.

I want to have the big old gate

Swing back to let me in;

I want to hear my name cried out

With happy, tearful din!

I'd like to smell the kitchen fumes;

I'd like a Christmas tree

With fifty colored candles, lit

In welcoming for me!

But as it is, I'll make the best

Of Christmas in the city,

For maybe kindly Santa Claus

Will notice me with pity,

And pick me up to take me home

For placing in your stocking,

So when you wake, alackaday,

You'll find me there a rocking!

Sonia Ruthèle Novák

Aunt Annabella's Bangle

WHETHER IT WAS A PRICELESS ANTIQUE OR NOT, THE LITTLE SILVER CIRCLET WAS THE CENTER OF A SERIES OF MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES

By Arthur Lowe

"D AUGHTER of a cross-eyed mule, cast thine eyes at the treasures before thee. Thou hast a nose as sharp as the chisel of Abdul the stonemason, but thou art *Inglisi*, and doubtless carriest many piasters in thy little bag. *Al-lahu akbar*, but it is a hard matter to part an *Inglisi* from her money!"

Fortunately Miss Annabella Vanstruyder could not appreciate the subtleties of the old Egyptian woman's speech, for she knew no Arabic, and, still more fortunately, she was relying upon an interpreter who was a diplomat above all things.

"What is she saying, Achmed? Does she want me to buy this junk?" Miss Annabella asked the red-sashed waiter.

"Even so, madam," murmured the obsequious Achmed, as he deposited a lemon squash on the table. "She say you are doubtless the daughter of a mighty prince, and therefore she very anxious to sell you certain valuable trinkets. Because you have eyes of discernment, she reduce the price."

"Now isn't that a nice way of putting things? And yet she seemed almost angry when she spoke to me. I guess it's what they call oriental inscrutability."

"Even so, madam," said the diplomatic Achmed.

"Ask her how much she wants for this bangle."

Miss Annabella picked up a silver circlet fashioned in the form of a snake and enameled in brilliant colors. The old woman sensed a possible deal, and came nearer to the table. She drew her black cloak more closely about her withered frame, and there was the light of cupidity in the narrow eyes that gleamed above her dirty yashmak. She appealed to Achmed.

"Does the *Inglisi* want to buy the bangle?"

Achmed nodded.

"Name a price, mother of wretchedness," he said.

"To this pomegranate blossom, to this daughter of perspicacity, the price is but fifty piasters. The bangle came from the pyramid of Meidûm, and is doubtless valuable, but the *Inglisi* can have it for fifty piasters."

"Child of sin, shame of thy mother, wouldst thou demand fifty piasters for this bauble? It is not worth ten, but maybe the *Inglisi* will pay twenty or thirty, for she hath a head as thick as a banyan tree. Go thou to the steps, and I will do business for thee."

The hag withdrew to the wide steps of Shepherd's, leading on to the Sharia Kamel, and Achmed began to explain the situation to Miss Vanstruyder.

"She ask two hundred piasters for the bracelet," he said; "but I get it for much less. She say it is the bracelet of one great king who lived two thousand, maybe five thousand years ago; but I say you no pay two hundred piasters for it, all the same. You give me one hundred piasters, and I think I buy it for you. Allah, but these old women are thieves!"

Miss Annabella took two notes from her purse and handed them to the waiter.

"Buy it for me, even if it costs two hundred piasters. I have a hunch about this bracelet, and I guess a hundred piasters isn't much to waste, anyway."

There was a beautiful smile on the face of Achmed as he swaggered back across the veranda, after completing the deal, for a great peace reigned in his heart. Without doubt Allah—might his name be exalted!—

had intended him to be a merchant in the Muski, rather than a waiter to the Franks. A few more opportunities such as this, and he would wear fine clothes and own a shop in the Street of the Silversmiths.

"Fortunate youth!" he reflected pleasantly. "Thy treasure shall be greater than the treasure of Suleiman the Great, and the jewels of thy harem shall be without price and beyond number."

"What did you have to pay her?" demanded Miss Vanstruyder.

"The rapacious woman demanded two hundred piasters, most excellent madam." The embryo merchant paused for dramatic effect. "Thy servant," he continued, "was successful in securing the treasure for one hundred and eighty. Here, then, is the result of thy servant's labor."

With the air of a conjurer, Achmed deposited a twenty-piaster piece on the table.

"I was so afraid you'd beat her down! She looked positively hungry; but there, you always do seem so kind, Achmed!"

Achmed bowed low.

"Such words are too kind for thy humble servant. He is more than rewarded for his small service."

"Did you ever?" reflected Miss Annabella. "That means he doesn't want a tip. I'd like to see an American waiter do something for nothing!" She fumbled in her hand bag, and drew out another twenty-piaster piece, which she placed with the silver coin on the table.

"Take these forty piasters, Achmed. I guess it's little enough for the trouble I've given you."

In justice to Achmed it may be said that he waved the gratuity away; but Miss Annabella was insistent, and so the forty piasters slipped into the capacious pocket of his long white coat, where it kept company with another hundred and fifty.

"Praise be to Allah, whose name be exalted!" he murmured, as he crossed to the gloomy shadow of the hotel. "My magic is greater than the magic of Ibn Sina of Bokhara. He turned a tree into a man, but have I not turned an empty pocket into a veritable mint of wealth?"

II

MISS VANSTRUYDER was filled with the glamour of the East, but she had brought to the East a very Western sense of proportion. In Hartford, Connecticut, it was not usual to haggle about prices. Why,

therefore, should one haggle about prices anywhere else? She was sure that the Egyptians were honest, but unfortunately they were the victims of a system that forced them to reduce prices to a point that rendered profit impossible. After all, they had to live, like the rest of mankind, so why should they be forced to sell their goods at a loss?

There was this bangle, for example. Supposing Achmed had obtained it for a hundred piasters, the poor woman would surely have lost money. It was a pretty bangle, and certainly looked old; but even if it had been manufactured in Harlem or Birmingham, it was undoubtedly worth ten dollars.

Miss Annabella slipped the silver circlet on her thin wrist, and eyed it quizzically. It would never do, for one had to be really young to wear a bangle, and she was—well, it was pleasant to be referred to as middle-aged. The bangle would do for Gwen, who would be pleased to have a present that really came from Cairo.

Through her darkly tinted glasses Miss Vanstruyder gazed out upon the jostling crowd of varicolored humanity on the Sharia Kamel. She was fond of watching people pass to and fro, for it was easy to weave stories around them, and to conjure up mystery and adventure.

There was the positively handsome man on the other side of the street, for example—he was no ordinary Egyptian, for his every line and feature plainly marked him as an aristocrat. Perhaps he was a prince in reduced circumstances. It seemed strange to think of a prince in reduced circumstances, and yet some of them were frightfully poor. Why, there had been a Hindu prince at college with Bobby, and he dressed very like the man on the other side of the street.

Miss Vanstruyder began to weave a story about an Egyptian prince, but the man across the way was joined by a very ordinary companion, and the trend of her thoughts shifted.

She was glad she had let Bobby persuade her to visit Egypt, for she had had a lovely time. They had seen everything there was to see, and Bobby had been delightful. That was the splendid thing about Bobby—although he was young and handsome and just a little bit wild, yet he was always so considerate to his aunt! He flirted outrageously with every pretty girl he met,

and yet he would gladly cut a dance to sit with Miss Annabella if she felt lonely.

She spoiled him dreadfully, for he was her favorite nephew, and ever since the dreadful day—which he, happily, had been too young to remember—when his father and mother had been killed in an automobile accident, she had cared for him as a son. Miss Annabella's mouth twisted into a queer little smile. Oh, yes, Bobby was wild!

"But I like 'em wild," she murmured.

She was waiting for Bobby now, for he had promised to take her out to tea at the Mena House. He had promised to be ready at 3.30, and at that very moment the clock on the English Cathedral was striking the half hour. Bobby was never late when he made an appointment with her. Even as she looked, she could see his white topee bobbing above the heads of the crowd. There was somebody with him, for another pith helmet—a rather battered-looking one—bobbed up and down at his shoulder.

"Phew!" muttered Bobby, as he drew near the table. "This is some weather! I wouldn't sell the thirst I've raised for a million dollars. Auntie, I want to present to you Professor Quinlan, the curator of the museum. Professor, this is my aunt, Miss Vanstruyder."

The gentleman with the battered-looking topee bowed to Miss Annabella. He appeared to be nervous and ill at ease, for his face was flushed, and his wide blue eyes blinked restlessly behind a pair of thick glasses. With a quick appraisal, Miss Vanstruyder decided that he must be rather more than fifty. Despite his curiously boyish face, she noticed, when he removed his hat, that he was practically bald.

"It is indeed a great pleasure to meet you, Miss Vanstruyder, but I am afraid you may think me an intruder."

The speaker shuffled from one foot to the other, and mopped the glistening dome of his head with a brilliantly colored handkerchief. He turned to Bobby, as if seeking inspiration.

Bobby, who had been looking out upon the medley scene in the street below, rose to the occasion.

"I met the prof in the museum this morning, and I've asked him to join the party for the Mena House this afternoon," he explained.

"Exactly," said Professor Quinlan. "I found your talented nephew absorbed in the study of certain hieroglyphic groups dating from the time of Shepseskaf—who, you will remember, ascended to the throne of his fathers after Mencheres. It is such a pleasure to find some one able to take an intelligent interest in the peculiarities that surrounded Shepseskaf's accession that I took him to the house, and showed him one or two little finds that I made during the course of excavations at Sakkara. During luncheon we were absorbed in the study of a cartouche which was actually discovered in the tomb of Shepseskaf. The cartouche is an unusual one, and would seem to indicate beyond doubt that Shepseskaf was the legitimate son—if I may use an inaccurate expression to convey my meaning—of Mencheres. As of course you know, there appears on the Sakkara tablet an inscription to the effect that 'King Mencheres placed him among the royal children in the palace of the king'—which would seem to indicate that he was only an adopted son. Your nephew and I studied the evidence most carefully to-day, and we came to the conclusion that the cartouche was a forgery committed some three thousand years ago. It is reassuring to me to feel that your nephew indorses my judgment, for I think we can now claim that expert opinion supports my claim."

Miss Vanstruyder gazed with open mouth at her nephew, who was leaning against the balustrade, smoking a cigarette.

"Sakes alive!" she began. "What do you know?"

Bobby nodded his head.

"Precisely," he murmured. "What d'you know about that? Just fancy a forgery three thousand years old discovered to-day, but I am prepared to stake"—his left eyelid fluttered tremulously, and Miss Annabella discerned it—"my reputation as an Egyptologist that the professor is perfectly right."

Professor Quinlan's face beamed with satisfaction.

"There, Miss Vanstruyder!" he exclaimed. "Could there be more definite corroboration of my judgment?"

"There could not," said that lady.

The conversation flagged awkwardly. The professor's brow was furrowed in thought, and Miss Vanstruyder was vainly trying to find a reason for her nephew's sudden passion for antiquities. Bobby him-

self seemed to be absorbed in the blue spiral of smoke that twisted upward from his cigarette.

"Since I've been fortunate enough to meet you, professor," said Miss Annabella, breaking the long silence, "perhaps you could tell me something about this bracelet. I bought it from an old Egyptian woman this morning."

"If you purchased it from a native woman," said the professor, removing his glasses, "I should be inclined to say that it is not worth more than ten piasters. If it proves to be a particularly good example of Birmingham ware, twenty-five piasters might not be considered exorbitant."

"But it's not Birmingham ware, professor. The woman I bought it from said that it was two thousand—maybe five thousand—years old."

Professor Quinlan replaced his glasses and took the bangle from Miss Vanstruyder's hand. For some minutes he scrutinized it carefully, and when at last he placed it on the table he did so lovingly, as if it were a priceless possession.

"This is most strange!" he muttered. "Most strange! I hesitate to express an opinion. Perhaps Mr. Vanstruyder would examine it, and then you would have the benefit of our joint experience."

A momentary look of consternation crossed Bobby's cheerful face, but he rose to the occasion nobly. Taking the bangle in his hand, he crossed to the edge of the balcony and held it up in the bright sunlight. After inspecting it from every possible angle, he rejoined the party at the table and carefully studied the enameled hieroglyphics. At length he looked up.

"I believe it is!" he murmured.

"Is what?" demanded Miss Annabella. Bobby ignored the question.

"D'you think it can be, professor?" he asked in an awed voice.

"I do," the professor answered deliberately; "but I am a little exercised about the third group of hieroglyphics."

"Curious," Bobby muttered, "but they bothered me, too. Otherwise there seems not the slightest doubt that it is—what you think it is," he ended amiably.

"Once again I am indebted to your nephew for an indorsement of my judgment, Miss Vanstruyder. Without a doubt this little bangle is one of the missing bangles of Amenhotep the Second. Brugsch, in the course of his monumental work on

Egypt under the Pharaohs, mentions having seen two such bangles when the tomb was first opened. The disappearance of these precious relics has always been regarded as a mystery, but it was generally assumed that they were stolen by one of the native workers. By a devious route, apparently, this one has come into your possession."

"And so it is really worth two hundred piasters?" Miss Annabella asked excitedly.

"There are plenty of collectors, madam, who would pay you fifty thousand piasters for the bangle of Amenhotep; but as a friend of your distinguished brother I would advise you not to sell."

"Holy rattlesnakes!" murmured Bobby, below his breath. "I never realized that my opinion was worth so much!"

"Gracious me!" said Miss Vanstruyder, fanning her face with her hand. "You don't mean to tell me that this little thing is worth ten thousand American dollars?"

Achmed shuffled away from his position behind Miss Vanstruyder, where he had been listening in.

"Calamitous mongrels!" he muttered. "By thine exceeding great honesty thou hast lost a sum sufficient to ransom the Holy Carpet! By the Prophet, but some way must be found to obtain this bauble that is worth so much to the learned ones!"

At the professor's suggestion, the bangle was carefully locked away in Miss Vanstruyder's trunk, after which an *arabiyeh* was summoned for the trip to the Mena House. Just as the driver was starting, Bobby appeared to remember something.

"Tut, tut, professor!" he said. "We were forgetting your daughter. If I remember rightly, we said something about calling for her."

"So we did, so we did," Professor Quinlan admitted guiltily; "but matters of greater moment had driven the promise from my mind. I was anxious, if possible, to get your opinion on the discoveries made in the tomb of Nofre-Ma at Meidûm; and that is a subject in which, I reluctantly confess, my daughter is not interested. Suppose we continue to forget the appointment? I am sure she will not be unduly disappointed."

Bobby held up an expostulatory hand. "Give the lady a miss? Oh, but we couldn't do that, professor! Besides, she will be company for my aunt."

"I fear I'm growing forgetful," murmured the professor apologetically. "Yes

—that was the very reason we invited her to accompany us. You made the suggestion yourself, if you remember.”

The driver of the rickety *arabiyeh* was ordered to call at the professor's house, near the museum, to pick up the fourth member of the party. On the drive toward Gezireh, the professor kept up a desultory and one-sided conversation, but apparently Bobby was not interested in the tomb of Nofre-Ma, for his replies were restricted to questioning monosyllables. Miss Vanstruyder remained discreetly silent, for she was beginning to see daylight, and she was curiously intrigued.

“This is my daughter Dawn—Miss Vanstruyder,” said the professor, after their vehicle had drawn up in front of a roomy house. “Apparently she was looking forward to meeting you, for she is all in readiness. I trust you will find that you have much in common.”

Miss Annabella shook the girl's hand warmly. There was a humorous twinkle in the older woman's eyes as she caught sight of the demure face beneath a shady hat. Certainly Bobby was an excellent judge of a pretty girl!

III

LESS than an hour after the party had left for the Mena House, a waiter from Shephard's, dressed in an inconspicuous jibbah, slipped out into the street.

“Oh, Allah,” he moaned, as if his body were being subjected to torments, “show thy servant a way to recoup his loss!”

Without waiting for a divine revelation, Achmed wended his way along the Sharia Kamel and thence eastward into the Muski, the main street of the native city. Outside the door of one Hassan es Sugra, a merchant of the gold and silver bazaar, he paused and rapped thrice on the door.

“Who is there?” quavered a voice from within.

“It is Achmed Abdullah, fountain of wisdom. He comes to seek thy advice.”

A few minutes later the street door was unbarred, and Achmed stepped inside. He was led up two flights of rickety stairs to a small room in which the so-called Fountain of Wisdom was indulging in a cup of coffee.

“Thou art famed throughout Cairo for thy wisdom, father of all that is good,” said Achmed, as he squatted down on a divan. “Great honor is reflected upon me wherever I go, for I am spoken of as a

kinsman of Hassan es Sugra, the wise one. Scarcely am I fit to claim relationship with one so favored by the Prophet!”

Hassan es Sugra nodded his bald head and bared a single yellow tooth.

“The relationship is distant,” he murmured. “Thy father was but a cousin.”

“Admittedly, great one. I mentioned kinship for no other reason than to show how unworthy this misfortune was to claim it. In the bazaar they say thou art gifted with supernatural gifts. I have heard it said that thou art wiser than the great Ibn Sina himself—that no problem is so difficult that thou canst not solve it.”

“They speak truth,” modestly admitted the wise one, as he sipped his coffee.

“Then, benign father of wisdom, thy aid is needed, for this spawn before thee is confronted with a problem that baffles his deficient brain. The gold that is buried beneath the pyramid of Haram el Kaddab is but a trifle compared with the wealth to be won by solving this problem.”

“Thou talkest like a young man with the fumes of hashish in his head; but speak on—I would hear about the treasure.”

Achmed Abdullah was a fluent speaker. In graphic sentences he outlined the purchase of the bangle and the subsequent discovery that it possessed great value.

“And this miserable dirt, this vile stench, made but a trifle of one hundred and ninety piasters, paragon of knowledge,” he concluded bitterly.

“It is well,” muttered Hassan, as he fingered his straggling beard. “Doubtless Allah—may his name be exalted!—intended that thou shouldst share this treasure with thy kinsman. When Quinlan Pasha spoke of this bangle, he mentioned another of equal value that is still missing?”

Achmed nodded his head.

“Thou art sure of this?”

“I was but a step away, father, and I understand the language of the *Inglisi* as well as I understand the language of love. There could be no mistake.”

“Then let us be no longer perturbed about this matter. In the mind of thy kinsman it is already settled. The second bangle must be found!”

Achmed looked at his relative blankly.

“Thou art exceedingly wise, venerable dispenser of knowledge, but where shall we look for this second bangle?”

“By perspicacity thou wilt never win Paradise,” muttered the venerable one.

"Thy mind is as slow as an *arabiyeh* without a horse. Thou art doubtless clever at making a few piasters here and a few piasters there; but when it comes to a question of considerable moment, thou art less use than a gnat's egg. Listen carefully, and I will explain more fully. In a land far distant from here I have learned that hunters snare wild beasts by throwing a captive animal into a pit. So loud does the captive cry that other kindred beasts are attracted to the spot and fall into the pit, where they are slain by the hunters. Know, blundering one, that by my superior wisdom I have devised a way whereby this bangle may be captured as these same wild beasts are captured. Thou wilt go to this woman with the sharp nose and the soft heart, and tell her that thou hast found another trinket similar to the first. Tell her the price demanded for this second ornament is but two hundred piasters, and that it can be procured in the Muski. Doubtless she will instruct thee to purchase it for her, but be careful in this matter. A glib tongue thou hast, and it will be but a simple matter to say that first the bracelet must be compared with the one locked in her trunk, so that she may not be defrauded. A fool this woman assuredly is, like all the *Inglisi*, but she will not be such a fool as to leave her bracelet in thy keeping. She will make an excuse, and will have the young *effendi* accompany thee into the Muski. First send a messenger fleetly to say that thou art coming, and then bring him here with the bracelet. When he enters the door—*pouff!* I will arrange with Mahmud, the *bawwab*, to bang him on the head. If Mahmud hits too hard, then we must put the young *effendi* into the Nile; but if the head of this young man is thick, as methinks it is, then we will leave him out beyond the Mosque el Ashraf until he recovers. Assuredly, after such a knock, he will never remember the house of Hassan es Sugra!"

Achmed nodded assent.

"Thou art truly a wise one, but what of thy miserable kinsman? When this young *effendi* is missed, there will be a great uproar. Achmed will surely be taken to the police station, and perchance he will be hanged."

"Miserable carrion, thou wilt soon be affluent. Must thou stay in Cairo when thou hast wealth that the Khedive would covet? I will lend thee a few piasters with

which to travel, and when I have sold this bracelet I will remit thy due share of the proceeds."

Achmed rose and crossed to the door.

"Marvel of sagacity, I will do it," he murmured. "*Leiltak sa' ideh!*"

"*Leiltak sa' ideh!*" returned Hassan, as the door closed.

IV

" 'A ROSE-RED city half as old as time,' " quoted Bobby, as he and Miss Vanstruyder stood together on the balcony of Shepheard's and looked out upon the jumbled houses that were subdued and beautified by the wraiths of mist rising from the Nile. He stretched out a hand toward the west, where the minarets and domes of the Mosque el Azhar gleamed like gold in the sunset. "Never have I seen anything so beautiful. I could imagine an artist driven mad by the beauty and romance of it all!"

"Oh, Bobby, I did think that last affair at Miami had cured you, and now you've got it worse than ever! It has never affected you quite like this before."

Bobby started guiltily.

"What do you mean, auntie?" he demanded. "You haven't noticed anything, have you?"

"Noticed anything! Why, you didn't take your eyes off the girl all afternoon, and now you're sentimental about the scenery! Some day, Bobby, you'll get caught, and then you'll be sorry."

"Now, auntie," said Bobby soothingly, "this is really too bad! I become friendly with a man for the sole purpose of improving my mind, and you accuse me of making up to his daughter. Why, I shouldn't have noticed the girl at all but for the fact that you commandeered the professor. It was disgraceful, the way you threw yourself at his head! Just because he mentioned the fact that he was a widower, you must needs act like a designing flapper. You surprised and shocked me, auntie."

Miss Vanstruyder dabbed her face with a tiny square of cambric.

"Oh, Bobby, I didn't, really! He was such a nice man when he could forget his wretched dynasties and hieroglyphics, and I liked talking to him; but really I was trying to keep him away from you."

Bobby nodded his head and grinned.

"You're a good sport to have for an aunt," he said. "What did you think of her?" he ended irrelevantly.

"She's just lovely, Bobby, but—oh, do be careful!"

Bobby sensed a note of wistfulness in his aunt's voice, and he dropped his mock serious air.

"It's all right," he said quietly. "It's the real thing, this time. You see, we've met quite a bit already, and Dawn thinks very much as I do."

"You've met quite a bit already? Bobby, I thought you met for the first time to-day!"

"Not on your sweet young life!" said Bobby cheerfully. "We've been meeting *sub rosa*, because the professor is a little touchy about eligible young men; but we've been meeting pretty frequently, all the same. I wangled the encounter with the dear old boy in the museum this morning, and I wangled the invitation to lunch on the strength of my interest in Egyptology. It was pretty well done, don't you think?"

"It certainly must have been," said Miss Vanstruyder; "and here am I aiding and abetting you by inviting them both to dinner to-night!"

"That was a stroke of luck I hadn't reckoned with," reflected Bobby audibly. "I should be able to put in some pretty fair work to-night!" He turned to his aunt. "You make up to the old man for all you're worth," he said. "I'd much prefer to have his consent."

"Talking of dinner," said Miss Annabella, ignoring her nephew's request, "reminds me that I have less than an hour and a half to dress."

"Good Lord, and it usually takes you ten minutes!" ejaculated Bobby.

V

AUNT and nephew were crossing to the hotel when Achmed glided from the deep shadow of a doorway and stood before them.

"Might thy humble servant speak to thee for one minute?" he said to Miss Vanstruyder.

"Sure!" replied that lady. "What is it you want, Achmed?"

"Madam, this morning thy servant was successful in securing a bangle. He has learned where another bangle may be bought like unto the first. Is it possible that madam desires such another bangle?"

Miss Annabella nodded encouragingly.

"You bet I do! What would it cost, Achmed?"

"Two hundred piasters is the price asked, but thy servant could doubtless secure it for somewhat less."

Miss Vanstruyder turned to Bobby.

"Isn't that luck?" she whispered. "You remember the professor said that two of those ancient bangles were lost, and I guess this must be the second one. Oh, Bobby, I would like to get it! It has suddenly struck me that I might make the professor a present of the two bangles—for the museum."

"It's probably a fake," Bobby answered without enthusiasm. "For all we know, the dear old prof may have been wrong about the first one."

Miss Vanstruyder shook her head.

"That's impossible, for he's terribly clever. I'm going to try to get this other one, too." She turned to Achmed. "Where can this bangle be bought?"

"It is in the Muski. An old man come from the village of Meidûm, where the old woman say the other bangle was found. He leave to-morrow for his home."

"So you will buy it for me in the Muski?"

Achmed nodded his head.

"But how am I to know that it will be like the first one?"

"Perhaps the *effendi* will accompany me, madam, and bring with him the bangle that was bought this morning."

Bobby looked up sharply.

"How long will it take?" he demanded.

"Half an hour," suggested Achmed. "Perhaps a little more, perhaps a little less. If the *effendi* likes, I will accompany him at once."

"Bobby, that will be splendid!" said Miss Annabella. "You will go, won't you? I would like to have them this evening."

Bobby nodded his head.

Miss Vanstruyder surveyed herself in the glass with a certain amount of satisfaction. Really, her frock was quite becoming. Somehow she had always felt that red suited her, and yet she had been afraid to risk it. This particular frock had been included with her baggage, but she had never really thought to wear it.

"A secret sin!" she murmured, with a smile, as she dabbed some powder on her becomingly tinted cheeks.

After all, forty-seven wasn't really old!

It was strange that Bobby hadn't come back. Achmed had said that they would

be gone for about half an hour, and it seemed a good deal longer than that already. Miss Vanstruyder glanced at her wrist watch and blinked her eyes with amazement.

"Good gracious!" she said aloud. "I've been more than an hour dressing!"

She lifted a light wrap from the bed and crossed the room to the door. Perhaps Bobby was waiting for her on the veranda. As she passed along the corridor, she tried the door of his room, but it was still locked. Of course, he might have dressed already; but it was strange that she hadn't heard him.

The balcony was deserted, save for an aged colonel reading the *Gazette* and a noisy party of subalterns discussing the day's racing at Gezireh. Miss Vanstruyder was perturbed, for she remembered that the Muski was not more than ten minutes' walk away, and it seemed ridiculous to think that her nephew had been a whole hour comparing two bracelets. She was sorry she had asked him to go, for in five minutes the professor and Dawn would be arriving. What could have happened to the boy?

So absorbed was she in her thoughts that she failed to notice an *arabiyeh* that drew up at the steps of the hotel. Professor Quinlan moved uncertainly before her for some seconds before she raised her eyes.

"How rude you must think me, professor!" she said, as she extended her hand. "To tell you the truth, I'm rather worried. My nephew left on an errand, and should have been back an hour ago, but there is no sign of him. Come along, Dawn," she added, turning to the girl, who had followed her father up the steps. "It's a woman's prerogative to be late, not a man's. If he isn't here when we get down, we'll begin dinner without him."

"Tut, tut, this is very trying!" said the professor, as he adjusted his tie, which had slipped halfway around his collar. "Where was he going, Miss Vanstruyder?"

"He left with Achmed, one of the waiters, to buy something in the Muski."

Professor Quinlan raised his eyebrows inquiringly.

"Please do not think me impertinent, but was he carrying much money with him?"

"What do you mean, professor?" demanded Miss Vanstruyder in a frightened voice.

"Extremely unwise of me! I should have known better," muttered the professor inaudibly. Aloud he added something about the concatenation of ideas.

Dawn came to the rescue, and suggested that inquiries should be made to see if Achmed had returned. He might be able to shed some light on the disappearance. Miss Vanstruyder hurried into the hotel, and the professor and his daughter were left standing at the top of the wide steps.

"What made you ask about money, father. Nothing could have happened to Bob—I mean Mr. Vanstruyder."

"It was foolish of me, very foolish. I will confess, however, that I feel a little anxiety. The young man struck me as being somewhat inclined to step in where angels might experience a certain amount of trepidation. Merely a passing thought, perhaps—"

Dawn looked up suspiciously.

"What, exactly, do you mean?"

The professor had no time to elaborate his theme, for Miss Annabella reappeared on the balcony, accompanied by the voluble *maitre d'hôtel*.

"Something has happened, Mees Vansterider," the man was saying. "That rascal Achmed should have been back an hour ago, for was not he to wait upon your table this evening? I myself have had to prepare all in readiness."

Miss Vanstruyder, vaguely alarmed, turned to the professor.

"I guess you had something the back of your mind when you asked if he had much money with him. Do you think anything can have happened?"

"Nothing serious," replied the professor; "but if he was carrying anything of value, he may have been knocked on the head. There is a peculiar acquisitive trait in the native which you may have remarked. From my observations I should say that the trait was developed to a high degree in the waiter Achmed."

"Oh, professor, how can you? Fancy saying that it was nothing serious, and then suggesting that poor Bob may have been struck on the head!" There was a choke in Miss Annabella's voice, and she dabbed her eyes nervously. "He was carrying something very valuable," she continued. "Achmed was taking him to a house where he could buy a bangle like the one I bought this morning. To make sure that the two were the same, he was taking the first one

with him. Oh, dear me, what a foolish woman I was to send him!"

"Calm yourself, I pray," murmured the professor gently. "In all likelihood he has merely been delayed. Just to reassure you, I will cause inquiries to be instituted."

The professor entered the hotel, and Dawn and Miss Vanstruyder were left together outside.

"Don't worry, dear Miss Vanstruyder," said Dawn. "I'm sure he is safe, and father knows so much about Cairo that he will soon get in touch with him."

"To say that nothing serious could have happened, but Bob might have been knocked on the head—oh, it was cruel! Did he mean that a knock on the head wouldn't hurt the boy?"

"Oh, father didn't mean that, I'm sure! He says awkward things, but he wouldn't say an unkind thing for worlds."

"There, there!" said Miss Vanstruyder, with a smile. "I'm foolish to take offense. Of course he meant to be kind."

For some minutes the two waited in silence.

"Here he comes," said Miss Vanstruyder at last, looking toward the hotel. "He looks very serious. I'm afraid it's bad news!"

Professor Quinlan approached them nervously, and cleared his throat.

"I've heard of him," he said, "but the news would appear to be somewhat unsatisfactory. I rang up the police headquarters, and a *shawesh* says he saw a Frank turn into the Sharia el Akkadi at about a quarter to seven. That would seem to agree with the time your nephew left here. The white man, so the *shawesh* says, was accompanied by a native, whom he took to be a dragoman. The *shawesh* did not leave his post at the end of the street until a few minutes to eight, but he did not see the couple leave the street. Sharia el Akkadi ends in a *cul de sac*, so the inference is that your nephew is detained in one of the houses on the street. It seemed unwise to ask immediately for police assistance, so with your permission I will visit the place myself and make further inquiries."

"That's what I call real good of you, professor; but if you go, so will I. If it should come to trouble, I guess you can count on me!"

"I assure you I'm not counting on trouble," the professor said doubtfully, as he looked at the lady before him.

"I'm coming, all the same," declared Miss Annabella, in a voice that brooked no opposition. "I'm coming prepared for trouble, too!"

Without another word she left father and daughter and rushed into the hotel.

"Oh, father!" said Dawn Quinlan. "I do hope nothing has happened to Mr. Vanstruyder! He seemed such a nice boy—the little we saw of him."

The professor paid no attention.

"A wonderful woman!" he reflected half audibly. "No suggestion of hysteria—handsome, resourceful, and, I gather, competent. The Muski is no place for her, however."

Miss Vanstruyder reappeared as suddenly as she had gone. She had exchanged her wrap for a serviceable coat, and in her hand she held a heavy revolver.

"You never know," she said in explanation, as she thrust the barrel into her pocket. "It may come in handy. It was used by my grandfather in the Civil War."

An *arabiyeh* was called, and Professor Quinlan and Miss Vanstruyder climbed in.

"You wait here for us, Dawn," ordered the professor, "and don't worry!"

VI

THE Sharia el Akkadi was deserted when the two arrived. The narrow street seemed like a quiet backwater in a rushing torrent, for the rest of the Muski was pulsating with life. Here and there in the gabled houses a light flickered behind heavy casements, and distant street lamps cast white circles of light on the rutted road.

"I think, before we make inquiries," said the professor, "we will walk to the other end of the street. If your nephew is detained, it will be at the other end, for the *shawesh* would have seen him had he entered a house near here."

Miss Annabella nodded assent.

The professor appeared to be absorbed in his own thoughts, and for some minutes they paced along in silence.

"I wonder if you will ever be able to forgive me!" he said at length.

"Forgive you, professor? Why, of course I will! I know you were only trying to be comforting when you said he might—have been—knocked on the head."

Miss Annabella gulped back a sob.

"That wasn't in my mind," the professor continued. "I was thinking about the bangle."

"But you only told me how valuable it was. There is nothing to forgive."

"Of course, of course, but I value your esteem so highly that—"

The sentence was left unfinished.

"What's that?" Miss Annabella stopped suddenly and jerked her companion's arm. Quite distinctly, above the rumble of the distant traffic and the subdued murmur of the bazaars, they could hear a cry for help. "It came from the house on the other side of the road!"

Before the professor had time to turn, Miss Vanstruyder was halfway across the street. She stopped before a gloomy doorway, panting for breath.

"Bobby, Bobby, is it you?" she cried excitedly.

"I will say that it is," replied a cheerful voice from within.

If the professor had been a little slow in following Miss Vanstruyder, he made handsome amends. He retreated to a position halfway across the road, and stooped in the attitude of an athlete beginning a race. There was a second's pause, and then he leaped forward with amazing velocity. Miss Vanstruyder felt something brush past her face, and instantly the door crashed inward, with the professor on top of it.

With commendable foresight, Miss Vanstruyder had come armed with an electric torch. She entered the house, and, after assisting the professor to his feet, switched on the light. Sitting at the foot of a flight of stairs was Bobby, and lying prostrate in front of him were an Arab and a heavy-jowled Nubian.

"How d'you do?" murmured Bobby, as he removed a cigarette from his mouth. "You must forgive me for not rising to greet you, but I've sprained an ankle."

"Oh, Bobby, we were so worried!" said his aunt. "We thought you might have been killed! What has happened?"

"Nothing serious to me, but these two gentlemen on the floor are a little the worse for wear. If you will call an *arabiyeh* and a policeman, and help me out to the street, I'll tell you all about it."

VII

OVER the table at Shepherd's Bobby told his story.

"I was a little doubtful about our friend Achmed when he suggested the trip to the Muski," he explained; "but as I owed you

a good turn, aunt, I thought it better to go. My suspicions developed as we walked along, for I remembered that Achmed had been hovering around when the professor explained about the bangle. I don't think I suspected foul play until we reached the Sharia el Akkadi, but then I confess I began to feel nervous, for the house he took me to was in darkness, and the street was deserted. It's curious how one sometimes has an inspiration."

Bobby paused for a moment, and grinned cheerfully, as if recollecting a pleasant thought.

"An idea came to me as soon as I entered the house. Achmed had ushered me in first, but I decided to stand to one side and let him pass in front. As I told you, the place was in darkness, and I couldn't really see what happened; but no sooner had he passed me than I heard a mighty thump, and poor Achmed crashed on to the floor. Of course, I realized then that the whole business was a plant, and I was prepared. Before the gentleman wielding a club had time to recover his balance, I stepped forward and drove at him with all my might. By good luck my blow must have landed just right, for there was a groan, and then another resounding bump on the floor. I discovered later that very fortunately my second victim had crashed his head against the bottom stair, and he was still unconscious when you came. Well, with two thugs kissing the sawdust, I thought the road was clear; so I struck a match, intending to have a look around. I didn't get much chance to see anything, for as soon as the match was struck an emaciated old man with a bald head and an unpleasant smile appeared at the top of the stairs, and began to descend them half a dozen at a time. There wasn't much time to act with deliberation, so I just stuck out a foot, and caught him at the bottom. Unfortunately I suffered more than he did. The two sleepers at the foot of the stairs deadened his fall, whereas I felt my ankle give a jerk, and I knew that it was badly strained. The old man must have been a single-minded sort of bird. Before I had time to move he had a hand in my coat pocket, and he got away with—"

The narrative was interrupted by Miss Vanstruyder.

"Oh, Bobby!" she exclaimed ruefully. "He got away with the bangle!"

"Bother the bangle!"

Three people turned with one accord to the professor, who was toying nervously with a piece of bread.

"I ought to have known better," he muttered. "It was all my fault!"

"What was all your fault, father?" inquired Dawn, resting a slender white hand on his arm.

"It was all my fault about the bangle. But for my foolishness you would have been saved all this trouble."

"Don't take it to heart, sir—I forgive you," said Bobby in a magnanimous tone.

"Young man, it wasn't you, but your aunt, of whom I was thinking. The last thing I wished to do was to cause her anxiety."

"But I'm all in a fog," said Miss Vanstruyder. "Why should it have been your fault, professor?"

The professor swallowed a mouthful of water and began to explain:

"The bangle was quite worthless, dear Miss Vanstruyder. Your nephew had claimed a knowledge of Egyptology, but my suspicions were awakened by an almost imperceptible motion of his left eyelid when he was discussing a certain question with you. It led me to believe that his pretensions were not sincere, and so I adopted a little subterfuge. When you asked me for my opinion on the bangle, I pretended to see something interesting in it; but instead of committing myself by a definite statement, I passed it on to him, knowing that it was quite valueless. He eluded a direct answer in a very clever manner, but, since he concurred in my final opinion, I knew at once that his knowledge of Egyptology was so limited as to be virtually nonexistent. You will never be able to forgive me, I'm afraid!"

He lapsed into silence. The expression of sorrow disappeared from Miss Vanstruyder's face, and she began to laugh.

"Why, I think you were just too clever, professor! I'm delighted to think you were able to trip up Bobby, and the bangle doesn't matter in the least. Of course I will forgive you, if you in turn will forgive my nephew—for I'm sure he acted from the very best of motives."

"The very best!" supplemented Bobby emphatically.

The look of dejection passed from the professor's face, and he nodded his head.

Bobby looked at Dawn, and then at her father.

"We should like the marriage to be as soon as possible, sir," he suggested amiably.

The professor cleared his throat.

"I have endeavored to the best of my ability to protect my daughter from the attentions of irresponsible young men."

"Very wise of you, sir," agreed Bobby.

"But I suppose I shall have to make an exception to the rule!"

Dawn and Bobby were standing together on the boat deck and watching the sea gulls swooping down upon the long white wake that stretched toward the east.

"D'you know, Bobby," said Dawn, "that bangle brought an awful lot of luck! I'm sure father would never have consented to our marriage if he hadn't been a little in the wrong that night, and I'm sure he and Aunt Annabella would never have married if it hadn't been for that blessed bangle!"

Bobby nodded his head.

"And the curious part about it was that I knew the bangle was a fake."

"Oh, Bobby, what a fib! I don't believe you were so clever."

"In proof of it," said Bobby, "here is the bangle."

He drew the little silver circlet from his pocket and handed it to Dawn.

"But, Bobby, you said that horrid old man took it out of your pocket!"

"I never did. I was going to say that he got away with my pocketbook; but as everybody jumped to the conclusion that he took the bangle, I held my peace. As a matter of fact, I was rather anxious to lose it. You see, I thought Aunt Annabella and the prof would be disappointed when they discovered it was worth practically nothing. When your father first passed it to me to examine, I had no idea he was bluffing. He seemed to attach a good deal of value to it, and I dared not disagree, for fear of offending him."

"I still believe you're telling fibs, Bobby," said Dawn, holding up her hand reprovingly. "If you know nothing about Egyptology, how did you know it was a fake?"

Bobby grinned.

"I may not know much about hieroglyphics and that sort of tosh, but if you'll look inside this bangle you'll see the letters 'N. S.' Now 'N. S.' is a twentieth-century inscription, and, being interpreted, it means 'nickel silver.'"

The Word Weevil

JOSEPH TOBIN, PLAIN-CLOTHES MAN, GIVES A CHAPTER FROM
HIS PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES, TOLD IN
HIS OWN LANGUAGE

By James W. Egan

IT ain't my fault the chief works me and a fellow elbow overtime nosin' through every hock shop in town for a bunch o' missin' Walthams; but the loud pedal is steamin' harder than the new percolator when I ankle into the five-room mortgage about fifty minutes past supper time.

"Believe me," snaps my wage yearner, "I'm gettin' terrible sick, not to mention tired, o' cookin' meals for people who ain't here to eat 'em! You were due an hour ago, Joe Tobin, and only the blessed Lord and Eva Morgan can tell what's keepin' Geraldine!"

"Don't go dynamitin' me!" I return, peevish. "With all them house prowlin's and gas station stick-ups and other jobs bein' pulled in this burg, Alec Tempest is quirtin' the boys each minute o' the day. Never seen the chief so crabby. Why, he run Hank Herbst and me ragged this afternoon tryin' to locate a few stolen tickers!"

"Well, you might have phoned. The city don't charge you nothin'," grumbles she who is my best critic and severest pal. "I can't imagine why Geraldine don't come. Somethin' like three hours ago she said she was runnin' over to Eva Morgan's for just a minute."

"Kittens will be kittens," I get off. "You don't s'pose Jerry and Eva can swap meows about all the other rolled hose in the neighborhood in a mere three hours, do you? Guess I'll go launder up, for I'm plenty hungry. Us guys ain't like bulls on a beat—we can't pick a lunch at every fruit stand."

When I finish sayin' it with soap, and check back to the chow, I notice the black shingle bob of our only child and heiress now present. My good-lookin' daughter is

bein' handed considerable ear medicine by the house doctor.

"What made you stay so long?" I catch.

"Mamma, you know I told you that Eva's sister Alice belongs to the Writers' Inspiration Club, and that they held a meeting at the Morgans to-day. Eva knows I'm interested in literary work, and she fetched me over, especially since Menken Moody was the guest of honor."

"Moody?" I cut in. "Any relation to old man Moody, the one-legged flagman down at the P. N. yards? He's the bozo who got drunk one night and went to sleep on the tracks. A switch engine come along and—"

"Be your age, dad!" Jerry throws a ton o' scorn my way. "Menken Moody is an author—one of the leading moderns. He's just come to Cascade City from the East. The idea of mixing a personality like him with a one-legged flagman!"

"Huh!" I says. "One-legged or not, old Moody's as fine a fellow as I know, now he's cut out the booze. He—"

"As if anybody cared about him!" she flippy remarks.

"Are you sure this biscuit really writes stuff?" I ask. "Mebbe he's just feedin' birdseed to a lot o' silly dames."

"Of course he writes—and not stuff, either! Back in New York he's been a sensation. His work has been featured in the *Intelligentsia Monthly*. He's so nice to meet, too! He told me he was going to be in Cascade City awhile, and he promised to come over some time and look at my story. I'm going to work on it to-night."

"There'll be dishes to wash and clothes to iron, young lady!" grimly states her mother.

"And," I recall, "Al Bunyan told me at noon he'd call up this evenin'. Prob'ly wants you to step out."

"Well, I'm not stepping!" says Jerry.

"Huh?" I'm surprised. "What's wrong with Al?"

Al Bunyan, a young husky just recently lifted out o' harness into plain clothes, ain't exactly a stranger around our cabin. A few months back him and Geraldine get acquainted at the policemen's annual ball, and it starts him to callin' frequent. Kind o' headstrong, like all young officers, and just a bit stuck on hisself, is Al. I guess that last's because he originally hails from southern California, and you know what them California cookies is like.

However, Al is far from a bad bet, and I'd rather see him helpin' warm a davenport than a lot o' eggs his age that I've met.

"Oh, there's nothin' wrong with Al," says Jerry, "except that his shoes cover too much territory and his hat too little."

"Now, now!" horns in the hornin'-in half. "There's lots worse than Al. Not that one cop in a family ain't plenty, what with meals bein' kept till all hours—"

"I'll say so!" Our daughter is real pert. "I don't think the man who traps me into wearing a white veil is going to have any badges pinned on him! Little Geraldine has her own ideas!"

Before we have to listen to any o' them ideas, the phone rings. It's young Mr. Bunyan buzzin' Jerry, but she refuses to date up. I note, though, she oils the turn-down a trifle by layin' claim to a bad headache—which ain't so unlikely after three solid hours o' the Writers' Inspiration Club.

Havin' put off Al, the child chores a few chores and then beats it off to her private nest. Soon we hear her bangin' away at the fourth-hand type mill we buy her a year ago, when she's takin' a mail-order course in how to author in so many lessons. I guess it's them kind o' courses that keeps the price o' stamps from ever comin' down.

"Ain't that story o' hers finished yet?" I chirp, before settlin' back to read what the evenin' paper has to say about the bunch o' bums who make up the police force.

"She don't do nothin' but begin," says my income taxer. "Geraldine is like a gas stove—flares up real hot in a minute, and dies out in another."

"Yeh," I mumble, busy readin'. "Hot Rover! This sheet pans us somethin' fierce!"

Ever since Cascade City's broken out in a rash o' robberies a few weeks back, the papers been handin' us the loganberry, which is twice as big as any raspberry. A four-letter word that don't mean ice is what the force is catchin' mostly.

Not only is stick-ups makin' people grab for the stars nearly every night o' the week, but an unusual number o' swell huts is bein' cleaned out. A few o' the boys figure mebbe these last prowlin's is the work o' some nervy lone wolf, who may mix around in Ritzy circles hisself. I ain't sold on the idea, but it's a cinch whoever's to blame—whether one guy or a gang—is gettin' away too good.

II

NEXT day it's as unpleasant around headquarters as a slap on a sunburned back. Durin' the night a bird with a big political pull has been taken for nearly everythin' in his cave but the new superiodine set, and he comes bustin' down with an edge temper and four ward leaders.

After havin' his ears crisped, Alec Tempest, head o' the dick bureau, passes on the chili stuff. We're the same as told if we don't shake it up most o' us 'll be flattenin' our arches along the old asphalt alleys. So we comb the village, but beyond crowdin' up the can with vags and hopheads booked on suspicion we ain't accomplished much by sundown.

Home late again, I find the for-bitter-or-worse lookin' pretty grim; yet she don't scorch me much as I expect.

"Only you'll have to be on time to-morrow night," she winds up crankily. "We're goin' to have distinguished company here."

"Who?" I gargle.

"Blame your darlin' daughter. She met the famous Menken Moody at the lib'ry to-day, and he seems to have made a great hit with Geraldine. Anyhow, she went and invited him to supper—dinner, she calls it—to-morrow; and he's promised to come."

Just then our fair child slippers in.

"So," I greet her, "the highbrow Mr. Moody—no relation to a worthy but one-legged flagman—is to skoff a free meal in our humble hut, huh?"

"He will honor us with his presence," snaps Jerry. "For Heaven's sake, dad, don't make any breaks! If you come to the table in your shirt sleeves, I'll never speak to you again!"

Lastin' through the followin' day without losin' my badge, I come home, doll a bit, and leave my coat on until seven o'clock. Supper—I won't call nothin' dinner which ain't served at noon—has been set back an hour or more.

Menken Moody appears in person about ten minutes past seven, full o' excuse-hims and shampoo smells. He's not so tall, nor so thin, either. In fact, there ain't nothin' about his looks to drive Rudy Valentino into takin' up longshorin'. However, I s'pose he ain't no worse-appearin' than most authorin' bozos.

Jerry, all fussed and fumblin' around like a catcher playin' shortstop, knocks down this word juggler to the manacle and me, and then we unscramble the napkins. Though Mrs. Tobin has been worryin' that the meal won't suit him, I perceive the honored guest gives our clam chowder, veal cutlets dipped in egg, riced spuds, and the rest o' the works, a man-sized play. He tucks away as much as me, and I ain't no canary. O' course, I'm slowed up some by havin' no coffee to drain things down with, Jerry insistin' it can't be served till the meal's over and nobody needs it. That's what happens when you start callin' a supper a dinner!

"Are you in trade, Mr. Tobin?" Moody asks me once.

"No, I got nothin' to trade," I tell him. "I'm a member o' the plain-clothes squad here."

It seems to me a funny expression chases over Menken Moody's map.

"Oh, you're on the police force?" he yodels.

"Uhuh!" I answer, careless.

"Well, well!" he gets out. "How deuced—er—interesting!"

The broadcastin' half now tongues in to inquire where he gets all his ideas for pieces to write, and he appears to welcome the change o' subject. Right away he begins to rattle off a lot o' stuff, usin' words longer than a Bertillon operator's memory. After hearin' Moody spout, I understand why all Webster's books go so heavy in poundage.

Prob'ly Jerry's the only one who gets a throb out o' the rest o' the evenin'. Before the great author bows out, the loud pedal and me are several hundred yawns to the bad; but the merry blah seems to tickle the child, and she makes Moody promise to call again and heave a professional eye over her girlish efforts. I'm hopin' it ain't soon. I

like to sit down to supper in my shirt sleeves. Besides, I ain't stuck on the bird. Somethin' assures me all his fiction don't go into writin'.

Al Bunyan bumps into me at headquarters next noon, and he ain't lookin' so cheery. He's just been in Alec Tempest's private office.

"Been gettin' the razz from the old boy?" I ask. "You seem as down in the mouth as an alligator's back teeth."

"It ain't that. The chief wasn't bawlin' me out." He borrows a match for his cigar. "Say, Joe, am I in bad with Jerry? She has so many headaches lately, it must keep you broke buyin' aspirin. What's put her off o' me?"

"She ain't, Al," I says. "She's just got hopped up over her writin' again, especially since she met a highbrow author a couple o' days back; but it won't be long till—"

"I knew there must be another guy in it!" he cuts me off. "What's the name of this writin' highbrow, Joe?"

"Calls hisself Menken Moody."

"Huh?" Al sputters. "Why, Joe, I know that bimbo! Frank Fackler and I give him the once-over this week!"

"What for?" I demand.

"Well, you know the chief has had Frank and me watchin' strangers around cheap hotels since all these robberies. This Moody is stayin' at the Simplex, and it's a cheesy place for a famous writer to park. Anyhow, Fackler and me quizzed him. He claimed to be from New York, and some o' his answers weren't so good. When he got sore, and told us to chase ourselves, we almost give him a wagon ride."

"But you had nothin' really on him?"

"That's it! Just the same, he'll bear watchin', I figure. He don't do nothin' but chase off to tea tussles with old dames, and he's behind in his room rent at the hotel. So he's cut me out with Jerry, has he?"

"Oh, no, Al!" I argue. "His writin'—"

"Yeh, his writin'—if any!" sneers my brother dick. "What if this author racket was a stall for him to horn into some huts he could prowl later, huh? Some smart bird is puttin' it over right along, Joe!"

"Hot Fido!" This gives me a wallop. "Mebbe you got the right dope, Al. I think we'll have to peer into the past o' this biscuit who uses so many big words. Last night, when I mentioned bein' on the force, he seemed a bit disturbed. Anyhow, he ain't Jerry's kind, an' I don't want him

around. Why don't you drop in and see her to-night?"

"No, I ain't comin' till she sends me a bid," he utters. "Meantime, this dictionary guy better be careful!"

It's like Al to be bull-headed, o' course. For several days he don't call or call up, and our child ain't what you'd term terrible tickled. Menken Moody, too, has failed to show, and poundin' a typewriter each night by her lonesome appears to be losin' its kick.

Then, right after supper one evenin', Mr. Moody shoves around. He has some book on authorin' to loan Jerry. He shakes his head when she invites him to linger awhile.

"I'm sorry, but really I can't. I must attend a reception at the home of a Miss Grange. Doubtless 'twill be a boresome function; still, I've pledged myself, you know."

"Oh, yes—Gladys Grange," murmurs Jerry. "She's been trying so hard to be a writer for years!"

The child can't help bein' cattish. Both the loud pedal and yours for less larceny know she loves Gladys Grange like she does cotton stockin's. Gladys is the blond, green-eyed daughter o' Durham Grange, a rich old lumberman, and the girls have always got along like cream and vinegar.

When Menken Moody has gone his way, Jerry don't say much, but her mother and me realize that if thoughts could stab, Miss Grange would now be as full o' holes as a slab o' Swiss.

III

For almost a week I'm away from home, Alec Tempest sendin' me and my partner, Hank Herbst, down into Oregon to bring back a cookie who has the annoyin' habit o' signin' the wrong moniker to checks. On my return, Jerry seems even less jolly and gay than when I left. The better barbered half wises me.

"Eva Morgan says Gladys Grange vamped Mr. Moody at her reception, an' every night now he's at her house. He shows poor taste, I must say! Gladys ain't as pretty as Geraldine, and she's frightful dumb."

"Yeh, but don't forget Durham Grange is sweet with sugar," I cackle. "Dad's bank roll prob'ly is one o' Gladys's most endearin' young charms."

"H-m! Well, you know how Geraldine despises her; but Eva Morgan is havin' a

big party next Saturday afternoon for Mr. Moody, and Geraldine has got the prettiest new frock and hat for it. If she don't make Gladys look like thirty copper cents!"

"Let Gladys Grange have that dictionary guy!" I growl. "Al Bunyan is worth a dozen o' him!"

I nearly tell her the young dick's suspicion of the author, but finally decide to hold back for the present.

The stick-ups and prowlers have laid off for a few days and given the force a breathin' spell. Then, on the Friday eve before Eva Morgan's party, the hut of Senator Sidney Perkins, a leadin' high-hatter, is looted; and don't think the Senator fails to squall plenty next mornin'!

Most o' the boys put in a hard Saturday, and I'm so busy I can't even go home to supper. Just as I finish feedin' at a quick and greasy near the station, Al Bunyan blows in. He's one o' the boys assigned directly to the Perkins prowlin' and this is the first I've lamped o' him all day.

"The very man I wanted to see, Joe!" he greets. "Are you able to make a little trip to the Simplex Hotel with me? Frank Fackler, my side kick, is under the weather; but I'd rather have you along in this case, anyhow."

"You ain't hung somethin' on Menken Moody, Al?" I shoot.

"I kind o' think so," he grins. "That bozo has some explainin' to do!"

"Give me the low-down, Al."

"Well, I happen to know that Moody was out all last night, and didn't get back to the hotel till this mornin'. Funny, huh? Next, one o' Senator Perkins's maids was woke up by the prowler, and describes a bird that might be the author."

"Sometimes a woman gets excited in such cases. You can't depend on 'em," I object out o' my longer experience.

"She ain't no dumbdora, Joe. However, the big thing is a notebook I found at the place. Belongs to Moody. His name's in it, and the addresses of some magazine editors. Ain't that a swell bit o' evidence?"

He shows me a little red volume, undoubtedly belongin' to the dictionary guy.

"Still, this is the kind o' notebook a writer would have," I observe.

"I tell you, Joe, he has a clever racket!" Al insists. "He burgles, with a little authorin' on the side. The writin' stall gets him into a lot o' swell joints."

"Careless o' a smart word weevil like him to drop this book on a job, Al. Did you pick it up in the house?"

"No, Joe, I didn't," he admits. "I found it close by the sidewalk runnin' in back of the place; but it shows he was around there, don't it?"

"So it would seem. Is Moody at the hotel now?"

"Yeh—I phoned the clerk to see. Been out to one of them piffle parties all afternoon, I guess. Come on—let's buzz him!"

While I accompany Al to the Simplex, I ain't altogether convinced we're makin' a wise play. As we step out o' the elevator at the third floor, a newspaper man I know steps in with a nod.

"Bill McGlone, o' the *Times*—wonder what he's doin' here?" I chirp.

"Them reporters are liable to be 'most any place," Al utters. "Moody's in 305. Give it a knock."

Menken Moody shows some surprise when the pair o' us amble in on him—not to mention uneasiness.

"Well—gentlemen?" he half stammers.

"I believe this notebook is yours?" Al snaps, pullin' forth his star bit o' evidence. "Correct?"

"Why, yes." Moody appears to grow more possessed. "Thanks very much for returning it. I knew I'd dropped it somewhere last night, and—"

"Can't remember where, huh?" Al sneers. "Well, I'll tell you, Mr. Moody! You lost it in leavin' the home o' Senator Perkins, which you prowled last night!"

The owner o' the small red volume stares at him.

"Really, you're absurd!" he declares.

"I never was inside the habitation of Senator Perkins in my life. Your accusation is absolutely ridiculous, not to say imbecilic. To charge me with being a midnight marauder, indeed!"

"Quit your apple saucin'—you ain't at no tea tussle now!" says Al Bunyan. "Your racket ain't so good as you thought. I guess you do more robbin' than writin'. Mebbe you never wrote a line in your life, for all I know!"

"Is that so?" squawks Moody. "I suppose both you brilliant sleuths are suffering from the same hallucination? Well, you nitwits, look at this—a check from the *Proletariat Weekly*, which arrived to-day. That's one of the most intellectual publications in America. Bah, such morons!"

He gets an envelope and pulls a blue slip o' paper from it.

"That's no alibi!" snarls Al. "Mebbe that check wouldn't pay your laundry bill. Where were you all last night?"

"Besides, you ain't explained the matter o' your notebook as yet," I add, kind o' sore at the remarks he's been passin'.

"I spent last night at the home of Durham Grange, the lumberman, as his invited guest," is the quick answer. "Mr. Grange can easily verify my assertion. All I know about the notebook is that I lost it on the way to the Granges'. I believe their home is not far from that of the Senator."

"H-m!" I scratch my head. "Seems to me the Grange dwellin' is located on the street runnin' back o' the Perkins place. Mebbe we're wrong, Al!"

"We ain't!" Al's bound to be bull-headed. "If we take him down to the station, Joe—"

"Do that, and I'll sue for heavy damages!" breaks in Moody, real saucy now. "I've had enough of this annoyance!"

"Come, Al!" I surrender. "No use puttin' the department in a hole. We're all wet, I guess."

As we start anklin' out, Moody's lip curls and he mutters some words which sound like:

"Can-nail! Boorzhwa!"

Al turns and leaps toward the author, and I fairly have to grab him and drag him out o' the room. He's still stubborn when we strike the street.

"Joe, I ain't done with that bimbo! I know he ain't O. K. He acted scared when we first busted in. I'll get him yet—see if I don't!"

I sympathize with Al, though I figure he's barkin' up the wrong evergreen. I'm convinced Menken Moody ain't tangled up in the recent robberies; but the last I see o' the disappointed young dick with the mulish mind, he's pikin' off an' mutterin' to hisself.

IV

I'm kept on the jump till nearly midnight, and don't chin none with the lawful wedded before breakfast late Sunday mornin'. She's readin' the *Times* as I grab a chair.

"Where's Jerry?" I grunt.

"Not up yet. She come home from Eva Morgan's party last evenin' as sour as week-old milk."

"So that nifty new frock and hat I got to dig down for failed to goal the great author, huh?"

"If he ain't got sense enough to see that Geraldine has Gladys cheated a hundred ways—well, my land!" the loud pedal gasps. "Here's a story in the *Times* sayin' the engagement o' Miss Gladys Grange to Menken Moody, the well known writer, will be announced in the near future. No wonder Geraldine—"

"Spendin' money, not speed, gets 'em," I chirp.

I can see now why Moody would be a guest for the night at the Granges', and the meetin' at the Simplex with Bill McGlone o' the *Times* is explained. Apparently Al Bunyan has been as wrong as three and five are eleven.

A bit ragged-lookin', Jerry shows up for bacon and eggs.

"Did you hear that Gladys Grange is engaged to Mr. Moody?" right away asks the splice. "Pretty fast work!"

"She can have him," responds the child. "Is there any grapefruit, mamma?"

"Kind o' put one over on you, huh?" I tease.

"Oh, it's prob'ly the little cat's money! I've no more use for him, anyhow. He treated me very mean yesterday afternoon. I'm through with men from now on!" Jerry bitterly concludes.

Our daughter certainly ain't in no mood for kiddin', but I figure it's her pride which is hurt most. Losin' out to Gladys Grange in anythin' is hard to take.

About the middle o' the afternoon I get ready for a little run down to the station, when the front doorbell rings. Jerry answers it. None other than Al Bunyan steps in; and what surprises me is he's wearin' a grin wider than the mouth o' the Columbia River.

"Hello, Al!" I greet, curious. "What do you know?"

"Oh, nothin' much," he replies, "except I just come from the station where I put a friend o' ours in a nice, homy cell!"

"A friend? You don't mean—"

"One George David Rubblestone, formerly known as Baron Kropoff, but more recently as Menken Moody—that's the parsnip!"

Jerry gives a little bleat. I'm startled myself.

"Huh?" I utter. "You've tied Moody up with this burglary racket, after all?"

"No," says Al, cheerful, "I made a boot there; but Moody's got more'n burglary to face. He's wanted for wife desertion, not to mention bigamy!"

"Why, Al Bunyan!" the child cries.

"Well, if this don't win the celluloid coffepot!" I utter. "Out with the dope!"

Al grins some more.

"I was plenty peeved for awhile last night, Joe. My first hunch had flivvered; an' yet I knew this guy looked scared when we walked into his room at the hotel. Here's somethin' else—remember them words he thrun at us when we left, about can-nail and boorjaw? They reminded me o' somethin'. You don't hear 'em every day, either. For more'n two solid hours I racked the old knob, an' then, all of a sudden, it come to me. You know I was on the force in Los Angeles for a few months, Joe. That was about four years ago. One night I was detailed to kind o' watch things at a society doin's where a Baron Kropoff was lecturin' on Russia—Kropoff bein' our friend Moody, only he was thinner and wore whiskers in them days. I heard him pull that can-nail and boorjaw stuff in his talk—see? He always could throw a mean hunk o' language. Now this fake baron made quite a stir among the society dames o' L.A., and finally a rich widow in Pasadena fell and married him. Then, right after the weddin', a Mrs. George David Rubblestone showed up and proved to be his undivorced, deserted true wife. Kropoff skinned out, and the police have been lookin' for him ever since. Well, as soon as I doped who Moody was, I wired L.A. and made sure he was still wanted. This mornin' I went to the Simplex and sprung it on him. He caved right in—and now he's in the can!"

My ears catch a laughin' gurgle. It's from Jerry.

"Oh, this is too good! And Gladys Grange went and got herself engaged to this writing bigamist and the Lord knows what else! She'll never live it down! Al Bunyan, I could kiss you!"

"How do you know I'd let you?" returns the stubborn young dick. "You better treat me right after this, or mebbe I'll be goin' over and consolin' Gladys!"

"Al, I'm so sorry!" meekly murmurs the child who at breakfast had been through with men forever. "Please forgive me!"

About this time I start for headquarters. I ain't needed here—besides, there's still them burglars to catch!

Velvet

THE STORY OF A RECORD BREAKING TRANSACTION IN HIGH-PRICED AUTOMOBILES

By George Allan England

"THE matter is," replied Dickerman, "that I've got thirty-two of those confounded Supremo cars on my lily-white hands and can't shoot 'em along to any ultimate consumer. That's all very well about my being pretty near a millionaire. It strips even a millionaire's gears to lose nine hundred and sixty thousand bucks!"

"What d'you mean, nine hundred and sixty?" demanded Ketcham. "They never set you back that much!"

"No, that's a fact," Dickerman admitted. "They were wished on me the time old Knibbs was driving one of 'em and tried to beat that train to a crossing. After the funeral, his widow had all the plans junked—wouldn't have another Supremo built; and the Supremo Corporation went blooey. I had to take all the cars there were—thirty-two of 'em—as part payment. That bankruptcy got into me for two hundred and fifty thousand. If I fail to unload the cars—and it's got to be done quick, for every month knocks value off of 'em—there's close to a million I don't connect with."

Hawley Ketcham, high-grade consulting business engineer, teetered back on the hind legs of one of Dickerman's chairs, and squinted at the October sunshine flooding in through one of Dickerman's office windows. It looked like gold, that sunshine did.

Ketcham's hair held something of that same quality, too—if you make the gold red enough. A sort of carotey gold, in fact; but Ketcham's smile was expansive, his clothes expensive, and his eye a sparkling blue. Tall and loose-hung, he looked lazily competent. Competent he was, but the seeming laziness only masked energies wire-tense when once released.

"Thirty-two big busses," he analyzed. "Nine hundred and sixty thousand smack-ers—that's thirty grand, per each and every. I'll spill you a secret, Dicky, and you can pin it in your lid—the market isn't hitting on all six, for cars at that figure. It's shot!"

"Don't I know it? But they're plumb bargains, just the same. Built to sell at fifty. Thirty's the hardpan price I'm letting 'em slide at."

"Diving ducks, man! They must be Pullmans or something!"

"They're something, all right," Dickerman affirmed. "Class? I'll say! Old Knibbs just went nuts, building 'em. Positively the most luxurious jobs you ever saw on balloons. Mult-eye-millionaire stuff, that's all. Imagine a man trying to horn into the auto game by building cars like that! I don't believe he unloaded half a dozen of 'em, Hawley, before the market blew up and he didn't beat that train, and so I got stuck. Now, if—"

"Where are these superbusses?"

"Storage, eating their silver-plated radiators off, every minute. That, and insurance, and—"

"I know! If I shove 'em out for you," asked Ketcham, his blue eye glinting, "what do I drag down?"

Dickerman pondered the question for a moment, rubbing a hand over his bald, protuberant brow. An older man than Ketcham, by five years, he looked five more on top of that. His mild seal-brown optics blinked contemplatively.

"Well, I don't just know," he stalled. "I might—"

"It's got to be mighty thick sirup," Ketcham declared. "If I decide to take a promotion, I never fail to put it across, as I think you know; but I won't touch it at

all unless I believe in it, and also get heavy sugar. How cold is the turkey you're talking?"

"Right on ice! How about counting yourself in for ten per cent?"

"Twenty-five."

"All right—that means twenty, on a compromise. Let's go! What's your first move?"

"Twenty thousand expense money, and an absolutely free hand."

"Free hand's O. K., provided you keep everything on a high plane, and—"

"This plane's going to climb right against the ceiling and stay there all the time. It's got to!"

"Fine! But twenty thousand for initial expenses—suffering Pilate, man!"

"I'll reconsider the twenty."

"Ah, now you're—"

"I'll make it twenty-five thousand—and, as I said before, thirty per cent commission. Otherwise—"

Ketcham let his chair bang down on its front legs again, and reached for his hat.

Dickerman reached for his check book.

II

VELVET! That was the keynote of the campaign. All velvet! Does not the word connote infinitely much? And was not Hawley Ketcham, C. B. E.—consulting business engineer—a past master in the matter of psychological connotations?

"Now that I've doped the general outlines of it for you, Dolly, try to get the big, central wow of the idea," he expounded to Dolly Rosales—alias Dizzy—over one of the most expensive post-theatrical dinners the Hotel Goldmore had ever served. "This is going to be a hot diggety-dog game, from tape to finish. Velvet—that's the watchword. That's what goes!"

Dizzy, her charmingly molded chin on the back of her exquisitely modeled wrist, her ditto bare elbow on the damask, murmured a lazy:

"Well, old honey? Where does this particular white-hot mamma fit?"

"You fit by being c-l-a-s-s, class; also by being probably one of the cleverest drivers that ever jollied a traffic cop. Forget that you ever had a past, Dizzy, and from this minute begin living in the present. Then—"

"I'd rather live *on* a present," she sinuously insinuated. "You've got to come across with a few, you know!"

"Don't I know, though? But that's all right, too, if you perform. Listen, little she-sheik! Forget your name is Dolly, or Dizzy, or whatever it is. Switch back to the Dolores you were christened. Haul out your Spanish-Mexican-Cuban ancestry, or whatever *that* is. Shoot in a hint or two about royal blood. If there's a bar sinister in it somewhere, that's all to the paprika, and—"

"Any kind of a bar is all to the paprika, these days," she sighed. "All right—I'll be Dolores de Rosales de What's-This, to a fare-ye-well! And what then?"

"Then play the game of the iron hand in the velvet glove!"

Dizzy Dolores smiled rather dizzily through the palest of blue smoke, then inspected her attenuated cigarette holder and murmured:

"Really, now, do my looks put over the royalty stuff, or don't they?"

"Like velvet!" Approvingly Ketcham studied her. "There's not a queen in the pack that's duck high to an ostrich, lined up side o' you!"

"Oh, thank you, kind Sir Chesterfield! That boosts my pay another fifteen per cent. Go on—step on the game!"

Carefully, and with full detail, Ketcham expounded, while Dolores blew thin vapor and now and then nodded.

"Velvet!" Ketcham was thinking all the time.

Ketcham was right. All about Dolores clung suggestions of just the rich softness which characterizes that royal fabric. Velvet skin—a velvet of creamy hue—velvety black eyes with long-drooping lashes, a velvety clinging of garments that molded themselves to velvet-soft curves—yea velvety, Dolores was perfect. Whatever her past might have been, its touch seemed to have been no more than a caress of velvet.

"Yes, I can put this brand of banana oil over, all right!" she smiled at last, with a gleam of impeccable teeth. "As you say, old darling, if there's any little grammatical skidding on the turns, they'll charge it up to my being a baby from Barcelona. But it takes a lot of Ritzy scenery to stage this kind of a show. You've got to come through with about a carload of appropriate fixings!"

"I'm on! That's half the game. Doll up, Dolly, and charge it to yours truly."

"Couple of rings, too, you know!" She extended a slender hand with nails like pol-

ished pink filberts. "No phony ice, either!"

"Right! Only—well, you know—don't dig *too* deep!"

Her chin, of purest outline, tilted mockingly as she laughed:

"That depends on what you call deep. I warn you, *amigo*, it's going to nick the roll some to have me pull the *carramba* stuff and be sweet little *señorita* from Seville. No refunds, either, on whatever you slip me! The layout's all mine for keeps, plus the hundred a week salary and the five per cent commish on all I land."

Ketcham held a moment's thoughtful silence. All about them sounded the chatter of voices and laughter; and through the bright-lit smoky air the jazzing of a hidden orchestra pulsed insistently.

"Well?" Dolores queried.

"M-m-m-m—huh," agreed Ketcham. "Only you've got to sign on the dotted line."

"Sign what?"

"Contract to stick on the job till it's all pulled across."

"Contract?"

"Yep—you're so infernally temperamental. Can't have you blowing up on me, and ducking, just when I'm lining up all my ducks in a row!"

"Oh, what's a contract more or less between old friends always ready to knife each other?" She blew lazy smoke. "Bring on your contract, old ducky, and your suckers, too; but nothing smaller than bone-fried millionaires, or it's all off. I'm not going to waste my pure young life absorbing apple sauce from any semiprofessionals. They've got to be the gen-u-ine, Simon-impure articles. The Dolores brand of velvet comes high!"

"Yes, I can see that already, without horn rims. Unfortunately I have to have it, just the same. As for the come-ons, they'll be hand-picked, all right. I'll guarantee each and every one of 'em to run up into seven figures, at least. No piker has any more chance in this game than a grasshopper has in a chicken coop!"

"How vulgar! I wish you wouldn't run so to poultry, though I suppose that's a habit with you." She made a little grimace of disgust. "As if I even knew what a chicken coop was!"

"No, it's been a long time since you were in the broiler class; but you can still flap a little, at a pinch. With plenty of velvet

and indirect lighting, you'll be the duck's wrist watch, just the same. All set for the contract, eh? Fine!"

III

As a sucker list, it was absolutely A No. 1. Nobody with less than an irreducible minimum of five million was admitted at all to its aureate precincts. And who said circulars? Well, hardly!

"Circulars? Well, I should say not!" Ketcham in due course expounded to Dickerman. "They're dead cats, circulars are. D'you know what each and every one on the list is getting?"

"Getting stung, I hope."

"I mean what I'm sending 'em."

"High-class, deckle-edge booklet? Must be something like that, the way you're chewing up the expense account."

"Booklet, my shingle-bobbed grandmother! Booklets are blah, these days. It's a letter, Dicky!"

"Old stuff!"

"Not *this* kind of a letter isn't! A personal letter, on the finest monogrammed, watermarked, hand-made paper in the market, written with a quill pen by the niftiest little chirographic artist in the city. Talk about your zigzags! She zags one word and zigs the next, and don't get more than about six on a page. And—"

"So it's a jane that's writing the letters? That makes two of 'em in on this deal."

"Well, two's a company, isn't it? And three's a crowd—of winners. Hawley, Ketcham & Co.—that's us. Perfect, from ignition to exhaust! We're framing to ignite unbounded enthusiasm and exhaust a few bank accounts—or at least lower their blood pressure. Those letters are a big factor. Every word in 'em looks like—"

"Velvet?"

"Purple velvet! Scented paper, too."

"That's bad! False play. No percentage in scented."

"Ah, but you don't understand! I'm putting the scent into percentage, and then some!" Ketcham waved an eloquent hand. "It's just what the French call a *soop-son* of a scent—just a mere ghost of a whiff; and it comes to 'steen dollars an ounce. I tell you, Dick, you take an envelope made of that superpaper, about five by six, with the address in India ink just hurled on it in that billion-dollar handwriting, and then you touch it up with half a sniff of the Bokay de Orient I'm squirting on it with an

atomizer—yes, sir, and marked 'personal,' too—and then—"

"Well, Hawley," the other agreed, creaking back in his swivel chair, "I admit that ought to get by the secretaries, social or antisocial."

"*Ought* to! Leaping lizards! Will ducks eat tadpoles?"

"If that's a natural history question, I've heard they might, when properly sold on 'em. Got any nibbles yet?"

"Only a dozen or fifteen. Oh, I'm a mere turtle for speed, eh? Appointment this P.M. for old Pickelhauber to have a conference with Dolores at the showroom."

"H-m-m-m! So? Which Pickelhauber's that?"

"John Q.—you know, the dishrag king."

"Oh, yes! He's the man who cleaned up seventy-five million, cleaning up hitherto uncleanable dishes."

"Sure thing! He invented a little patent rag with antiskid chains woven into it. Yes, that's the baby. He's got water on the knee, brain, eye, and liver, but none on his financial rating. It's nearer ninety millions, now, than seventy-five. If my Dizzy Dolores don't put a Velvet over on him, I'll eat one—buttered!"

"No, you won't, either," objected Dickerman; "not at the present price of thirty thousand!"

"I mean—you know, Dizzy's sure to land him. Just wait till he gets a slant at her!"

"Likes the ladies, does he?"

"Oh, boy! Thinks he's the Sheik Razz el Jazz himself! He's got a classical line of chatter. Always calls 'em goddesses and all that stuff, and lots of 'em fall for it, strong. Prides himself on being a fast worker. When Greek meets Greek—"

"They ask, 'What's the price of fruit?' Has he ever been nicked before? I don't follow scandal much, you know."

"Nicked? Man! He's been nicked till he looks like the razor a man's wife just borrows for a minute; but he never learns. He's still sheiking. He's about the most unpopular old skate in town, with the h-men; but the ladies—that is, some of 'em—just idolize the very desk he signs checks on. When he gets one good flash at Dizzy D. and the sample car in its velvet setting—m-m-m-m-m, baby!"

"Sounds good!"

"Is good! Say, by the way, Dick, you haven't seen my layout yet, have you? Oh,

forget that 'busy day' stuff! Is a spider ever too busy to look at a web? There, that's much better. I thought you would. Let's go!"

IV

"VELVET is right!" admitted Dickerman, some fifteen minutes later, as he and Ketcham entered the wondrous showroom—hired on the ground floor of the St. Prejus Hotel at a fabulous monthly rental—which now displayed one of the Supremo cars of even more fabulous luxury.

Velvet *was* right. Small wonder that Dickerman stood for a silent moment, almost gasping. Velvet, indeed! The walls were draped with it, away up to the lofty ceiling, in massive purple folds, through which the window embrasures cast a dim light shaded by regal hangings. An imperial throne room for King Car, no less! The floor was purple, too. For all furnishing, there stood a magnificent wicker table, two huge wicker chairs, and—the limousine.

The Supremo no longer, it had now become the Velvet. A new, hand-wrought gold name plate of chaste and costly pattern graced its radiator, which gleamed with glints of authentic silver. Pen fails, typewriter shrinks, before the task of trying to catalogue the massive elegance, the almost overpowering beauty, grace, and lure of that culminant exemplar of the car builder's skill and decorative taste.

"By the great kumquat!" murmured Dickerman. "I never in all my life! Isn't she one grand beaut, though?"

The room contained two grand beauts. One was a magnificent, scintillating, cushion-sprung, shock-absorbered, balloon-tired, deep-upholstered, long-hooded dream of mechanical wizardry. The other was a magnificent, scintillating, cushion-sprung-gaited, shock-absorbing, ballroom-attired, unupholstered, long-headed dream of physical witchery. The construction and finish of both was perfection absolute. To have owned and operated either would have presupposed almost unlimited cash; but, judging from appearances, no price could have been too high.

"One grand beaut!" repeated Dickerman, in an almost awed murmur.

"Which one d'you mean—the bus or the widow?" likewise murmured Ketcham.

"Widow? Widow?"

"Sure, she's a widow! She's been one lots of times. Marriage is a mere little

habit with her. The more they marry her, as the proverb says, the more she turns 'em loose. Prize winner, eh?"

"Pair of prize winners! Hawley, old chap, you're a genius—a positive genius. Congratulations!"

"Oh, well, when it comes to speed, I'm not the sleeping snail's hind leg," admitted Ketcham, with an expansive wave of the hand at the Velvet car and at Dolores, who—darkly radiant with beauty matching that of the sample machine itself—now approached with silent sinuosity.

Enraptured by the silky clinging of her gown, by the nuance of exotic perfume of *fleurs de la Chine* that titillated his olfactory nerve, Dickerman felt uneasy stirrings near his solar plexus. Oh, yes, there was a Mrs. Dickerman! There were also three young Dickermans; but—you know—

"Enchanted, I am sure," Dolores murmured, with an indefinable foreign accent, as Ketcham made known Dickerman's name. The gracious gesture of a slender, velvety hand set gems of price a sparkling—gems that had sorely ravaged the expense account, even as the clinging gown had ravaged it. "Always charmed to meet a friend of Mr. Ketcham's. Mr. Ketcham, he is—what you call it?—so awfully clever, *no es verdad?*"

"Back up, Dizzy!" cut in the business engineer. "Chop the tall-domed foreign stuff till it's time to flash it on old Pickel! What do you think this is, anyhow—a meeting of the Revolting Daughters? Too much class for us! Mr. Dickerman here is the owner of the cars. He's just dropped in to see how you're plugging the game, and whether I'm working you too hard."

"Oh, it's awful! 'S awful!" asserted Dizzy. "I'm Tillie the Toiler, and then some. Here I have to sit in all these disgusting rags and tags, dragging down only a hundred berries a week and commission, lamping the sparkle of these mere rocks"—she scintillated her new rings—"and waiting to make dates with trillionaires. Then I shall have to take 'em out road burning in the Velvet, a sample of what this one here is which. If that's not abusing the downtrodden female sex, and don't call for child labor laws to stop it, I'd like to be informed!"

"Stop feeding out the comedy stuff, Dizzy," ordered Ketcham, "and get to tacks. Get serious! Pickelhauber's due to show in less than half an hour, and you'll

have him all to your lonesome. Nobody else 'll be let in. Remember how I've lined things out to you. You're not to shoot any mechanical selling talk at all. Horse power, mileage per gallon, and all that stuff don't go good, from a woman. That's right, isn't it, Dick?"

"Sure, that's right," Dickerman agreed, without entirely comprehending; for his attention, like his eyesight, was occupied with Dizzy.

"All you've got to do," Ketcham pursued, "is to persuade that old low *Thario* to go joy-riding with you in another Velvet, exactly like this. Though it don't have to be exactly like it, you understand. This one, here, is a limousine. He can have a touring, or a sedan, or whatever he likes; but anyhow, each and every kind—get him sold on this!—is the last word, the dern-near cry, as they say in French, of car perfection. Play that up *strong!*"

"What d'you think I am—a dumb Dora? Of course I'll play it up strong! I guess I know—"

"Talk upholstery, fittings, and doodads all you like, the way I've rehearsed you. That's good she-salesman dope; but the main squeeze proposition is that you're going to do the chauffeuring yourself, and there'll be no hurry-up talk about getting back to the city—get me? That's the right dope, Dick, isn't it?"

"Sure, that's right," agreed Dickerman, his ego still absorbed by the captivating one. "Right as rabbits, or rain, or whatever's the rightest thing in the world!"

"Show the poor old Pickle fish it's velvet all the way through," Ketcham continued. "Velvet to ride in and on, velvet for his bank roll—no upkeep expenses—velvet to be chauffeured by a Spanish *señorita* who—hello, what the devil now?"

"Sh-h-h-h! Can it!" whispered Dizzy Dolores, as the door swung wide. "That's old Pickelhauber now. He's early. You two birds, blow! Leave him to me!"

The massive door, closing behind the form of John Q. Pickelhauber, revealed him in that richly subdued and velvety light as a shortish and oldish man with a baldish head, blinkish eyes that watered, and a limpish knee. John Q. walked with a stout cane and much difficulty. He hesitated for a moment, glancing about in some astonishment. Then he hobbled to meet the *señorita* as she in turn advanced, with the grace of a panther, to meet *him*.

Ketcham and Dickerman, meantime, discreetly drifted toward the door, Ketcham audibly remarking *en route*:

"Very well, then! It's understood I'm to have a mauve coop, to be delivered no later than next Thursday?"

"Quite understood, *señor!*" the lady agreed. "*Adios!*"

Wherewith Dickerman and Ketcham made a strategic retreat, and very carefully closed the door. Safely out in the corridor, Ketcham fell to humming:

"Will you walk into my parlor?
Said the spider to the fly;
'Tis the prettiest little parlor
That ever you did spy.

"The way into my parlor
Is up a winding stair,
And I have many curious things
To show you when you're there!"

V

"SEÑOR PICKELHAUBER, I believe?" inquired the Señorita Dolores de Rosales, with a smile that gleamed. "Of course! I have see your picture everywhere!"

"Oh, thanks! H-m-m-m! Yes, I'm John Q. Pickelhauber," the dishrag sovereign admitted; "but not senior. There ain't no junior, yet—he, he!—so there can't be no senior, can there?" He paused a moment, with an asthmatic catch of the breath in his pendulous-wattled throat, as his myopic vision more fully absorbed the *señorita*. "I—h-m—that is—"

"Oh, *carramba*, Señor Pickelhauber! Oh, how I am happy to meet you—to meet a famous man!"

She came close, so very close that he couldn't help absorbing the exoticism of her *fleurs de la Chine* nuance; and she gave him a hand, velvet-soft, smooth, warm—a hand that clung. You know the kind. Once at least to every man comes the realization of that sort.

"So often, so much have I hear and read of you!" she went on. "Ah, *señor*, this is indeed one gr-r-r-rand pleasure!"

"You heard o' me, eh?" queried the dishcloth magnate, bridleing up like a pouter pigeon. "Well, now, that's nice, ain't it?"

"How could anything be—what you call?—otherwise, concerning you? Pray, will you not do me the honor of to sit down?"

With a gem-flashing gesture she indicated the inviting wicker chairs close beside the table, whereon glowed an irides-

cent-shaded lamp. John Q. Pickelhauber subsided into the soothing embrace of deep cushions, and managed to cross his better leg over the other. As he set his cane against the table, Señorita Dolores queried:

"So this is indeed *you*?"

"Sure it's me! Nice day, ain't it?"

"Divine October weather!"

She draped herself exquisitely in the other chair, with the soft-hued light alluringly warm on her taper fingers and bare arm. Truly a regal figure, in an imperial setting!

"Divine," she repeated thoughtfully, her eyes dreamy. "Will you smoke?"

She gestured languidly at the table, which held profuse supplies of all things tempting to the most fastidious worshiper of St. Nicotiana. "No? You never smoke? Ah, how wonderful! Nor I, either, even though I am Spanish. You must be one model man, *señor!*"

"Well, I dunno 'bout that, *saynora*."

"*Señorita*," she gently corrected. "I—alas, poor little me!—I have no husband."

"Ain't, eh? Well, that's too bad! You're just *saynora*, then? H-m-m-m! No, I guess I ain't exactly a model; but speakin' of models, I reckon I'm lookin' at one right now!"

"Oh, the car, you mean? Ah, it is true! *Carramba*, she is beautiful, no? One flash at her make—what you say?—make all other look seeck. I have ride in many car, *señor*, here in the land of the free and the home of the brave, also in that so degenerate Europe—cars, some of them, that the crowned heads have had their feet on the clutch of; but—"

"As I was sayin'," the dishrag czar insisted, "a thing of beauty, by gumbo, is a joy forever. That's from a poem, an' it's true." He cast a meaning glance at Dolores, who remained sweetly oblivious. "Say, did anybody ever tell you—"

"The Velvet, *señor*, she is something quite unique. The upholstery, she is—what you call?—in one class all by herself. She is *de luxe*!"

"Yup, she's got the looks, all right; and so has somethin' else around here—he, he! Speakin' about bein' all in a class by yourself, did anybody ever—"

The *señorita's* daintily slipped foot moved ever so slightly, and John Q. Pickelhauber's cane slid from the table edge and fell to the floor. Lumbagoishly he stooped to reach for it, but the *señorita* reached

first. Their hands met for an instant—and hers clung. The dishcloth emperor's eye was gleaming, albeit a little moistly, as he once more set the cane up.

"Didn't nobody ever tell you," he insisted, "that *you* was in a class by yourself, too?"

"Oh, la, la, you American men! You gallants, you wicked flatterers!" The entrancing smile she flashed at him was pure Art with a capital A. "But I do not flatter the Velvet when I say *she* is in a class all alone!"

"Ain't you ever all alone, too—kind of lonesome sometimes?"

"Ah, if you knew! But let us not speak of that, *señor*. My sad heart, what has that to do with motor cars? What I wish to ask you is—"

"Yes, yes?"

"To geeve me only one hour of your time—or maybe two."

"As much, by gumbo, as you want!"

"That is, you comprehend, to drive with me in the Velvet. Ah, what an honor I would—what you call?—steam it!"

"Esteem, *saynorita*—esteem."

"Ah, *carramba*, yes—esteem it, if you would only drive with me!"

"Drive, eh? What d'you mean? With a shuffer?"

"Oh, no, no, it is not necessary. I am—pardon my seeming to boast—very expert with the *automobilismo*. I shall be happy, ah, so happy, to be your chauffeur, your demon—demon—"

"Demonstrator?"

"Yes, that is the word—your demonstrator. How clever you are, to understand my imperfect speaking! Of a surely you know some far-away, very difficult road where we could fully test the remarkable engine, the so wonderful springs, the marvelous shock absorber, and—"

"I reckon you're about all the shock absorber most men would need, *saynorita*. He, he! That is, it's a shock to a real red-blooded he-man to see beauty like yours goin' to waste; but you soon absorb a man, by gumbo—that is, I hope you get me, and—"

"Oh, you *Americanos*! You naughty, naughty boys! Don Juans, all of you!" She gave his arm a slight reproving tap. "But how I could not forgive you? So clever, so full of repartee and wonderful, clever expression! Your words, they sparkle like—like the Velvet car! Or the dia-

monds, no?" Her own new diamonds sparkled, but John Q. Pickelhauber had eyes only for the exquisite contours of her face, her throat. "Ah, you wicked flatterers!"

"Not at all, *saynorita*! I never was more sincere in all my life. Excuse me for mentionin' it, but don't you know you've got a regular Juno's beauty?"

"Who's got a Jew-nose beauty?" demanded Dolores, with sudden heat. "Be yourself! Back up!"

"No, no—you don't get me at all!" the dishrag monarch disclaimed. "I mean, you got the beauty of Juno!" Earnestly he blinked. "You know who Juno was, don't you?"

"Juno?"

"Sure, I know! How 'bout you?"

"Oh, la, la! She was one water imp, no?"

"No, no—not a water imp. No imp at all, *saynorita*, but a kind of nymphet. A goddess, like. The goddess of beauty—that's what she was. *Them old Greeks called her the ox-eyed goddess. Well, you're an ox-eyed goddess, too!"

"Oxide? I should say *not*! Say, if you're going to sit there and insult me!" Dolores's eyes narrowed dangerously. "I'll have you distinctly understand—but never mind!" Once more she softened and smiled. "It make no difference, *señor*; and you have not yet answer my question. Will you drive with me, very, very soon?"

"Any time you say, Juno!"

"And give me time to demon—demonstrate? And plenty of the distance, no?"

"What's time or distance, with a queen drivin' a car that's fit for only crowned heads to sit in?"

"*Magnifico*! It is agreed, then?"

"By gumbo, Juno, lead me to it!"

VI

HIGH was the exultation of Mr. Hawley Ketcham, consulting business engineer, when Dizzy Dolores telephoned that no later than the very next afternoon he was to place at her disposal the classiest of all the ultra-classy Velvet "coops."

"There's one sucker with the hook through his gills already!" he communed with himself. "She's a wise little kick, busy Dizzy is. She's got the barb into the dishrag dictator, all right-o! Will he buy? Will a duck swim? Oh, joy!"

Sitting there at his desk, he thrust his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat,

teetered his chair back and forth, and began humming:

"Thirty-two Velvets hangin' on the wall—
Thirty-two Velvets hangin' on the wall!
Old Pa Pickelhauber's bound to fall—
Thirty-one Velvets hangin' on the wall!"

Bobbie Burns, however, once said something about mice and men; and Bobbie knew. On the morn following the Pickelhauber demonstration, Señorita Dolores de Rosales wafted into Ketcham's office, and thus spake she:

"I'm done!"

"What?"

"Quitting!"

"What?"

"Knocking off, getting through, walking out on you. In other words, the whistle's blown, and I'm blowing, too. Don't you savvy U. S., old honey? I'm firing myself, resigning, skating off the job!"

Before the business engineer could speak, she burst into song:

"Oh, I ain't comin' back no more, no more—
I ain't comin' back no more!
I'm takin' the air, so what do I care?
For I ain't comin' back no more!"

"Here, here, cut out that singing!" commanded Ketcham angrily. His voice had grown as harsh as a loud speaker with a sore throat. "You can't throw me like that! Why, to-morrow—"

"That's *mañana*, and—yes, we have no *mañanas* to-day! Get me, Ketchy, and get me right!"

"But see here, now! Get down to cases! What's the big idea?"

Dizzy chose one of Ketcham's cigarettes from a box on the desk, lighted it with vast deliberation, and blew a thin arrow of smoke at him.

"Consider yourself kissed good-by," she smiled, with carmine lips. "The big little old idea is that I'm done being a mechanical vamp and selling Velvets on salary, fixings, and commish."

"You are, like—"

"Sh-h-h-h!"

"I've got a contract with you! I can hold you to it!"

"Hold and be hanged, old wonderful! Your vacuum tubes are cracked, antenna busted, and batteries down." Insolently she laughed. "Did you ever know anything to hold *me*—even a hubby?"

"But—but listen!" Ketcham's eyes were pale with dread as he stared at her

in her little three-piece frock with its straight jacket—a figure of exasperating defiance and allure. "Listen, Dizzy! Haven't you a heart?"

"Nope—only a pocket, and that's going to be full up in less than no time, now. Fact is, it's love's old sweet song that's warbling in my perfect thirty-six bosom—love of about ninety million berries!"

"What d'you mean, ninety million? You don't mean old Pickel—"

"Yes, he's elected. He's fallen harder than a pedestrian hit by a Velvet hitting a hundred. Some sheik! He sends a funny line of compliments across—calls me a nymf or an imp, or something, and talks about my oxide beauty; but there's no sense in passing the raspberries to a petting papa that can write his check for eight figures. I'm willing to swap my one for his eight, any old time! Some money talks, but *his* is a steam siren with a megaphone attachment!"

"You—you don't mean—"

"I mean that when old Pa Pickel broadcasts with all his amplifiers going, everything else has got to get off the air—even you, old precious!"

"You—aren't going to—"

"Not one tiny little bit. Get me right!" She transfixed the distressed Ketcham with another lance of smoke. "It's all as level as a June horizon at sea—wedding bells and all the fixings. He popped last night at Snapdragon Inn, out at Macheesapunk Lake. I blushed, pulled a few ineffectual struggles, and surrendered. I'm to be Mrs. Pickel, *pronto*. Look at the rock he handed me this morning! Makes *yours* look like something the feline fetched in. This Pickel rock—never was a rock in the cradle of the deep like that! Was there, now?"

Languidly she flashed a solitaire like a humming bird's egg, only bigger. Ketcham made noises in his throat.

"And we're to be joined in the holy bombs of patrimony next Tuesday, at high noon," she lilted along. "I'm putting it across quick, you see, in case he's got arterio-squeegee and might flop before I can get protection from weeds and a will. We're going on a honeymoon to Algiers, Hongkong, Yonkers, and all way stations, right away, and the alimony is due to begin about January. Well, that's about all. Is it enough?"

Ketcham, sunk far back in his chair, stared with eyes of agony, like those of an

expiring fish. He passed a trembling hand over his ardent hair. He tried to speak, but all he could articulate was:

"My—my Gawd!"

"Meaning money?" the lady smiled.

"I'm a ruined man!"

"Oh, you should worry about that! Lots of people get rich being ruined. Don't I know?"

"But, Dizzy, listen! You won't do this to me! You can't leave me ditched with four blowouts and no spare, my gas tank empty and my magneto smashed! You can't duck out and leave me with thirty-two Velvets on my hands! You won't!"

"No, I won't—that's a fact."

"Ah! I knew you had a heart!"

Dizzy tossed away her cigarette, opened her vanity case, and with complete *aplomb* powdered her nose before replying:

"Not thirty-two. Old Pickel has bought the coop I demonstrated to him. That leaves only thirty-one."

"Stop! This shall not pass!" Ketcham's gesture was tragic, Napoleonic. "You throw me, Dizzy, and I'll throw you!"

"Meaning how?"

"Meaning just what I say! I've always been a good friend of yours, Dizzy. Your past has been your own business, and in spite of it I've thrown a good many nifty little jobs your way; but that's all off now. The throwing I'm going to do now, if you throw me, is something else again!"

"You don't mean to say," she flung at him, less ox-eyed now than tigress-eyed, her mouth setting to a vivid gash of crimson—"you don't mean you're going to Pickelhauber and—"

"Oh, I'm not, eh? Huh! Oh, no! Just watch me ankle along to papa—that's all! I can a tale unfold, and don't you forget it! Now you'd better be a good little girl, or—you know. Are you going to postpone those wedding chimes till the Velvets are all put over? Going to keep your contract?"

"No!"

"That's enough for me. Good-by!"

Leaving Dizzy staring, furious, white to the vermilion lips, Ketcham sprang up, seized his hat, and departed, on an errand of vengeance and destruction bent.

VII

"I DON'T know as I got to discuss my personal affairs with you or any other man!" old Pickelhauber truculently repelled

him, when Ketcham had forced an entrance to the dishrag monarchical presence. "What I do is my own business, ain't it?"

"Not in this case, my dear sir," Ketcham stood to his guns. "The young lady you propose marrying happens to be one of my employees in a certain highly important matter. She's under contract with me, and if you make her break it I may have to take some mighty disagreeable steps."

"Disagreeable to who?"

"Well, frankly, to both of you."

"You mean you'll sue?"

"That's what; and you, as making her break the contract—also as her husband and a man of great wealth—"

"Damn it, you can't shake me down!"

"See here, Pickelhauber!" Ketcham's voice lowered. "Get me right! You know what the papers have said about you three or four times already; and here's another woman. If this thing got to a jury—"

The dishcloth dictator scratched a worried bald spot, and blinked moistly.

"Let's be reasonable men," he suggested, in a different tone. His last two appearances in court had taught him the value of sweet reasonableness. "What's this here contract you've got with my *saynorita*?"

"When I told him," Ketcham erupted an hour later, in Dickerman's office—"when I put all my cards on the table, d'you know what he said? Dying ducks, man, *do* you know what he said?"

"How the devil should I know?" demanded Dickerman. "Told you to go fry, most likely. If you'd get calm, Hawley—if you'd quit wearing out my rug, stop shadow boxing, and sit down and tell me, I'd know!"

"He said—he said—oh, my suffering Shanghais! He—"

"Told a bunch of clerks to throw you down the elevator, eh?"

"No! Said if 'twas only a matter of selling thirty-one more cars that stood between him and Dizzy—only a little matter of nine hundred and thirty thousand bucks—why, damn it all, look!" Ketcham's quivering fingers drew out his pocketbook, extracted a very pink check, and shoved it, fluttering, at Dickerman. "Look—look!"

Dazed, Dickerman could only stare at it and gulp:

"For cheese sake!"

"Velvet! Velvet all around!" Ketcham ululated. "He's got the Velvets, the whole

blamed lot of 'em. Says he's going to give 'em away to his best customers for wedding souvenirs. Dizzy, she's got the velvet of picking Pickel's bank accounts. The head porter at the hotel, he's got all the velvet fittings. I've got the velvet of my thirty per cent commish on nine hundred and thirty thousand. It's too damned big for me to believe in, yet. You've got the velvet of unloading all the Velvets and cashing in on seventy per cent of the rake-off; and—"

"Whew! All got velvet, except old Pickel. What the devil has *he* got?"

"How about a velvet skin he loves to touch? I reckon he's satisfied; so what's the answer?"

But answer there came none.

Reaching for a pin, Dickerman was busily engaged in jabbing it into his left wrist.

"It hurts—this must be true!" he was communing with himself. "It hurts, it hurts—thank God, it *hurts!*"

A Dress Affair

THE ROMANCE OF RAIN PURPOUS AND SUNFLOWER DAY, WHICH
WAS BADLY TANGLED UP WITH OLD MAN DAY'S
ONLY PAIR OF TROUSERS

By E. K. Means

"**D**E objection in de way is dat gal's ole paw," Rain Purpous said disgustedly, as he smoothed his kinky hair, adjusted his white collar, and pouted his thick lips around a cigar whose wrapper was as loose as a kimono.

"Is you axed de gal to marry you yit?" Skeeter Butts asked, as he lighted a fresh cigarette upon the stub of an old one.

"Naw—I'm skeart she'll refuse me," Rain sighed, his black face seamed with tiny wrinkles of worry. "I loves her till I cain't think of nothin' but; an' she acks like she's so crazy about her ole dad dat nobody else mustn't apply."

"Dat looks like a objection in de way," Pap Curtain asserted, as he shook the ashes of consumed tobacco from a vile pipe and proceeded to refill the bowl.

"Ole man Day is de chunk in de road," Rain insisted. "You see, he's powerful old, an' he needs Sunflower to keep house fer him, an' so he fights off all de nigger men dat wants her."

"Dat's frequently done," Figger Bush announced, as he brought forth a twist of tobacco and began to cut it into proper particles to smoke. "Now I rickoleck when I wus gittin' ready to start fixin' to git married—"

Three-fourths of the Big Four of Tick-fall never allowed Figger Bush to reminisce. They knew all about him, so they always stopped him because they had heard that one before.

"Well," Vinegar interrupted, "when you move de chunk out'n de road an' ax de gal, an' Sunflower turns tode de son of a gun you is, don't fergit dat I am a preacher an' I kin marrify you-alls as cheap as anybody."

"Ef you craves my advices," Figger Bush barked, "I say, go an' ax her. Ef she say no, dat means 'Not now.' Hang on to yo' mattermony plans like a pup to a root, an' you'll win out."

"Dat ole man owns dat cabin he lives in, an' he promised to gib it to Sunflower when he ups an' dies," Rain sighed.

"Do he own any mo' property?" Skeeter Butts asked.

"Naw," Rain said in disgust. "Sunflower supposes him. I heard him say dat he didn't own but one pair of pants in de world."

"He don't need no mo'," Figger Bush declared. "A nigger don't need to wear but one pair of pants at a time, an' dar ain't no real needcessity fer mo' pants dan one pair."

"He might git dat pair tore or stole," Skeeter Butts laughed. "I remember once, when I wus shawt on pants an' didn't hab none but whut I had on—"

But three-fourths of the Big Four never allowed Skeeter to indulge in reminiscences, either.

"Looky here, Rain," interrupted Vinegar, "is you got five dollars to pay a preacher to marrify you?"

"Suttinly."

"Is you got some money to buy some cotehouse weddin' licenses?"

"Shorely."

"Dat's fine!" Vinegar applauded. "Now you listen to me—go to de cotehouse an' buy yo' wedlock papers, den go to Sunflower an' ax her to marry you."

"Ef she say positively not, I lose my money I spend fer de wedlock papers," Rain protested.

"Naw!" Vinegar bawled. "Ef she puts her years back an' begins to kick, show her dem papers, an' tell her dey won't be took back an' cain't be exchanged."

"Dat 'll pussuade her!" Pap proclaimed. "I been married five times, an' I done played dat trick successful three times. De yuther two times de womenfolks overtuck an' captured me. I remember one time—"

But the three-fourths rule applied to Pap also.

"See kin you remember to tell it another time," Rain grinned, as he arose and reached for his hat. "I'm leavin' dis here Henscratch right now. By de time Skeeter smokes two mo' cigarettes, I'll be axin' Sunflower to change her name!"

II

HALF an hour later the door of the Henscratch soft drink emporium was thrust violently open, and Rain Purpous came plunging across the floor, to stop at the table where the Big Four were still in session.

Rain's garments were saturated as if he had run through water. Every pore in the skin of his face was dripping with perspiration, and every pore of the skin of his body had become a spouting fountain. He had nearly run the breath out of his body, and for awhile he stood panting and unable to speak.

"Dar now, Vinegar!" Skeeter snapped. "Dat comes from givin' free advices about how to propose to a nigger woman. You cain't never tell nothin' about 'em excep' dat dey is gwine do diffunt."

"I been livin' ever since I wus bawnd," Figger Bush remarked, "an' I done noticed dat whenever a woman gits a man on a run, dat man starts soon an' goes fast!"

"Dey kin shore make you hurry," Pap Curtain grinned, his yellow monkey face twisted with amusement. "Rain looks like he ain't come through a gentle summer shower, but met up wid a cycaloon storm or cloud-bust an' waded through de deep waters of tribilation."

"Whut ails you, Rain?" Vinegar asked solicitously, when he saw that the colored man had recovered slightly from his wild flight. "Did de gal say no, an' say it wid cookin' pots?"

"De gal say yes," Rain panted; "but I shore got in bad wid her old daddy!"

"Whut is dat you is totin'?" Skeeter asked curiously as he noticed Rain wiping his face upon a garment slung across his arm.

"Dis is ole man Day's onliest pair of pants," Rain replied simply.

"Huh! You cain't make a hit wid a man by runnin' off wid his britches," Figger Bush laughed.

"Gimme a smoke, an' I'll tell you about whut come to pass," gasped Rain, as he sat down at the table and wiped the perspiration from his face upon the seat of the trousers he was carrying.

They promptly supplied his needs, and he began:

"I bought my licenses, an' went out to de cabin, an' axed Sunflower to marry me. She didn't lose no time in argufyin'. She just said she would. Den she axed me to throw out a pan full of dishwater, an' I throwed it out de winder widout payin' no mind whar it wus fallin' at."

Rain paused, lighted another cigarette, and glanced down at the trousers, which were still slung across his arm.

"Well, suh, Sunflower's paw wus asleep in a rockin'-chair under dat winder, an' dat pan full of dishwater landed right in his lap an' wet his pants scandalous."

"Lawd, dat wus onlucky!" Figger Bush chattered. "Whut did he do to you?"

"He ain't done nothin' till yit," Rain said nervously. "He riz up from his chair, an' cussed extravagant, an' bragged his brags about killin' de nigger whut throwed dishwater on him. At fust he thought it wus Sunflower, an' he didn't mean whut he said; but when he found out it wus me who done it, Lawd!"

Rain lighted another cigarette and glanced down once more at the extra pair of trousers. He spread them out for the inspection of his four friends, and showed where the greasy dishwater had wet them in front, from the waistband to the knees.

"You shore sloshed him!" Skeeter Butts giggled. "Move along wid de details. How did you git dem pants off'n paw?"

"He took 'em off," Rain said simply. "Dey wus wet. Sunflower run out to whar he wus, an' throwed her arms around him, an' begged his parding, an' led him in de house. He wus kickin' an' cussin' an' bawlin' fer his shotgun. He went in his room, an' jerked off his pants, an' throwed 'em out de winder, an' bawled to Sunflower to wash 'em out."

"She didn't make no good job of it," Skeeter Butts commented, inspecting the garment.

"She didn't had no chance to clean 'em," Rain explained. "I wus hid behind a tree, watchin' fer a good chance to skeddaddle; an' when paw throwed his pants out'n de cabin, I grabbed 'em an' tuck a sneak."

"Brainy wuck!" Pap Curtain applauded. "Paw ain't got no mo' pants, an' so you's got him shut up in de cabin till you fotch his britches back."

"Dat looks reasonable to me," Rain grinned. "It's awful to be so pore dat you ain't got but one pair, but it's convenient fer me, an' I shore am glad to take advantage of my advantages!"

"Cain't you sneak back to de cabin an' git Sunflower, an' let me pull off de weddin'?" Vinegar asked eagerly.

"Naw!" Rain said sadly. "Ef paw had throwed his shotgun out de winder wid his pants, but—"

At this point the door of the Henscratch was pushed back so violently that it hit the wall with a loud crash. The five men sprang to their feet, expecting to face an irate man demanding his purloined wearing apparel and brandishing a double-barreled shotgun.

But the intruder was Sunflower Day—a soft, fat girl with dull eyes and a stupid face. Her mountainous corpulence heaved from her unusual exertions as her lungs gasped for breath. Like Rain, she had run all the way from her cabin, and she was almost exhausted.

"Bad luck, Rain!" she puffed. "Look out fer yo' life! Paw is out wid his shotgun, an' he's lookin' fer you!"

"How come he got away?" Rain inquired, shifting his eyes uneasily, and planning his way of escape in case of need. "I figgered I wus safe, because I had sneaked dat part of his clothes dat he cain't travel in public sawsiety widout havin' 'em on."

"He had a long rubber raincoat whut a white man gib him. He buttoned dat up tight around him, an' picked up his gun, an' started," Sunflower told him.

"But it ain't rainin'," Rain protested, glaring out of the window at the blazing sunshine of an August day and the heat devils which danced in the middle of the road where no shower had fallen for weeks.

"He's out lookin' fer a nigger named Rain, so he is wearin' his raincoat," Figger Bush giggled. "When he pops you a couple of times wid dat shotgun, dar'll be some fall of rain in Tickfall!"

"Yep—he'll make a splash!" Skeeter Butts announced. "When Rain come in here, he looked like he'd been travelin' by water, an' furnishin' de water hisself!"

"Dis here Rain is gwine blow away," the frightened colored man announced, as he rose to his feet. "I'll leave dese here pants wid you-alls, but I hopes you won't gib 'em to paw fer about fo' days. I'm gwine make myself hard to ketch!"

"Dar he comes now!" Sunflower exclaimed excitedly, as she pointed through the window in the rear of the house. "You better go out de front way, Rain. Mebbe he won't see you."

Rain threw the trousers over the counter, where they fell in a heap upon the floor, and ran out of the door. Keeping the house between himself and his armed enemy, he crossed the fields and hid in the woods.

Old man Day was named Sun, and he called his daughter Sunflower; but the sunny part of the father was eclipsed in this hour. He was clothed in a rubber raincoat, which had once been worn by a tall white man, and Sun, being short in stature, was completely enveloped in its folds. The August sunshine had nearly melted the rubber, and the old man was tortured by the heat as he had never been in his life. He was unable to get any relief unless he sought privacy and removed his one and only garment.

"Whar is Rain gone at?" he demanded in an irate voice.

"Dunno, Sunny," Vinegar said quietly. "Does you want to see him fer some special bizzness?"

"Shore do!" Sun announced, flourishing his gun. "He's around here somewhar, I knows, because Sunflower is settin' here wid you!"

"Rain ain't here now," Skeeter told him positively. "I owns dis place, an' I knows."

"Whut did he do wid my pants?" Sun demanded.

"Your *whut*?" Pap asked innocently. "Do tell, ain't you got no pants on?"

Sun saw a gleam of amusement in the eyes of the men, and he was not disposed to make fun for the crowd. His next move filled their hearts with terror. Both hammers of his old shotgun snapped back and he raised the weapon to his shoulder, pointing it at the four men.

"Stand up!" he bawled.

The four men sprang to their feet, and their hands went up in the air above their heads.

"Fer Gawd's sake, Sunny," whined Vinegar Atts, "stop stickin' dat gun at my stomick! Dat's a awful tender place on me! Point it at Figger Bush fer awhile!"

"Naw!" wailed Figger Bush. "My legs is wabblin' now, an' ef you waves dat gun todes me I'll collapse down on de floor an' hurt myself!"

"Shut up!" Sun snarled. "Do you know whar Rain is at?"

"Naw!" howled the four.

"Do you know whar my pants is at?"

"Naw!" the quartet unisoned.

"Ef you niggers is lyin', I'll come back here an' kill you all!" Sun snapped.

Then he turned to Sunflower, who stood tremblingly with her back against the wall. Pointing the gun at her stupid head, he said:

"Go home!"

There was a clatter of heavy shoes upon the floor, and his daughter fled toward her own habitation. Sun glared at the four men for a moment, and then said:

"I'm gwine now, but I'm comin' back; an' when I gits back, you niggers will be beggin' fer yo' lives!"

He walked out and slammed the door behind him.

"I don't object to a feller like dat slammin' my door, ef he's leavin'," Skeeter Butts grinned. "He shore is mad!"

Skeeter paused a moment in the middle of the floor and gave himself up to deep thought. Then he ran to the telephone, called for a certain number, and spoke:

"Is dat you, Constable Huff? Well, dis here is Skeeter Butts. I calls you up to tell you dat a crazy nigger man's down here. He's walkin' aroun' wid a shotgun an' talkin' about killin' folks. He ain't got no pants on."

Skeeter paused to listen. Then he said:

"Yes, suh, dat's whut I said—he ain't got no pants on, an' he's got a gun. Come down right now. He's done helt up de Henscratch, an' he said he wus comin' back to kill us!"

III

THE four men, their nerves badly shaken by their experience, sat down to await the officers of the law.

"When dat nigger pointed dat gun at my head, I got de notion dat I hadn't been gwine to church as reg'lar as I should of," Pap Curtain said nervously.

"I remembered a whole lot of things I hadn't oughter done an' some things I done lef' undone," Figger Bush quacked; "but now dat nothin' ain't happened to me, I cain't rickoleck none of dem things. Bless Gawd, I'm got a convenient memory!"

"Dat ain't de fust time I got in shotgun trouble over a weddin'," Vinegar Atts remarked. "I remember one time—"

"De only thing I remember is dat ole crazy nigger said he wus comin' back," Skeeter Butts interrupted. "He said it real forcible, an' I think he means it. He mought come back real soon. I motions dat we adjourns to our homes an' arms ourselves!"

"Motion carried unanermous," Vinegar Atts bawled, as they all sprang to their feet. "I'm gwine git my saw-off shotgun an' fix ole Sun so he cain't wear pants fer a month of Sundays!"

Hastily locking the doors of the Henscratch, the four men ran in different directions, armed themselves, and came back to the soft drink emporium just as the town constable arrived in his automobile.

"Where did your crazy man go?" Mr. Huff demanded.

"Us don't know, cap'n," Skeeter said; "but we'll he'p you hunt him. He's a awful dangerous nigger, an' he's scandalizin' de town!"

"Hop in!" Huff commanded.

They rode around several of the crooked streets of the negro settlement, and then drove up the hill where the Shoofly church baked in the August sun.

"Dar he!" Figger Bush barked, as he pointed to a row of trees in the rear of the church.

Sun heard the shout, and started to run. Figger fired. The shot of the old gun splashed around the feet of Sun Day, and brought him to a halt.

"Hop out!" Mr. Huff commanded.

Each of the four men leaped to the ground and ran behind the Shoofly church.

"Line up out here an' help me capture that man!" Huff commanded.

"Naw, suh, Mr. Huff," Skeeter said quaveringly. "I ain't no fightin' man—I's a bizzness man; but I'll lend you de loan of my gun!"

"My ole gun is onreliable," Vinegar Atts said. "De las' time I shot at a rabbit, my gun snapped."

Huff grinned in humorous appreciation of the colored men's fears, and then advanced alone to the capture.

"Drop that gun!" he called, and Sun Day laid the weapon upon the ground at his feet.

"I ain't mean no harm, Cap'n Huff," he said apologetically. "I'm jes' huntin' a nigger dat stole my onliest pair of pants."

The four men, hearing the humble tones of this voice, came from the shelter of the church as brave as lions.

"He do mean harm, cap'n," Skeeter Butts asserted. "He helt us up in de Hen-scratch an' promised to kill us all!"

"Make him take off his raincoat!" Pap Curtain snarled.

"You don't blame me fer huntin' de man whut swiped my pants, does you, cap'n?" Sun said.

"Come along with me," Huff ordered. "You can argue the case in court. I don't know anything about it."

Skeeter brought Sun's gun to the officer of the law, and then Huff and Day got into the automobile, leaving the Big Four stand-

ing in the churchyard holding their guns. Then they started for the woods, in search of Rain. When they found him, the party went to Day's cabin, where Sunflower was waiting.

That afternoon the four men went to the little jail and conducted a conversation through the window with their prisoner.

"You is got a new son-in-law, brudder," Vinegar Atts announced.

"Don't give a dern!" Sun replied.

"Dis here weddin' fee I bestows on you," Vinegar said, as he poked a five-dollar bill through the window. "Mebbe us hurt yo' feelin's, an' dis is a peace offerin'."

"Huh!" Sun grunted, as he took the money and surveyed it with critical eyes. "Dat Rain Purpous stole dis money out'n my pants!"

"Us kin explain to Mr. Huff an' git you out'n jail, ef you wants out," Skeeter Butts said.

"Don't want out!" Sun snapped. "Dar ain't nobody in here wid me, an' I likes to be alone. Nice an' cool in here, an' de vit-tles dey fotch me is good. I'll stay here till de newly-weds come back from deir honey tower. I ain't got nobody to cook fer me till my Sunflower gal shows up agin."

The four men stood for a moment, wondering what to say next. Sun Day sat at the window with an air of peace and content. The dark, cool depths of the jail contrasted sharply with the blazing heat in which they stood.

"I motions we adjourns somewhar, brud-ders," Vinegar Atts remarked at last. "Dis sun is so hot I'm fryin' in my own grease!"

"It's better to be inside lookin' out dan outside lookin' in," Sun grinned.

Figger Bush thrust a bundle through the iron bars of the window.

"Good-by, Sun," he said. "Here's yo' pants!"

A PARASITE

UPON a bough
A strange growth clung, and fed
There on the lifeblood
Of the splendid tree—
The tree that was his heart—
Till it was dead,
Sucked dry to feed
Her woman vanity!

Roselle Mercier Montgomery

The Loup-Garou

A COMPLETE SHORT NOVEL—A ROMANCE OF THE LAKES
AND FORESTS OF NEW BRUNSWICK

By Theodore Goodridge Roberts

Author of "Jess of the River," "The Wasp," "Where All Trails End," etc.

THE Cherettes came from the north, from somewhere about the headwaters of the Quatawamk, down sixty miles of white water and black and over a dozen portages into the Restigouche, and up the Restigouche past Five Fingers and Otterslide, and up Lame Squaw brook. They came in four eighteen-foot, home-made canoes of white winter bark, and every canoe was loaded to capacity with gear and provisions.

It must have been one devil of a trip! There were but five people to the four freighted canoes—two of them females, and one a boy of fifteen, at that—so the thought of their labors on the portages is enough to kink the back and sore the shoulders. Yes, it must have been one devil of a journey, for they have never been heard to mention it; and the time it took them is known only to themselves, to this day.

Consider their sufferings from black flies and mosquitoes, in addition to the labors of the portages. People who know don't travel far in that country in June, unless they have to. That was the first thought concerning them that wriggled in the mind of Peter Cronk.

The Cherettes had no more than stepped ashore at the foot of Snowshoe Lake, and lit a couple of smudges to drive off the tormenting flies, when old Cronk emerged from the bush not twenty yards away, and advanced across the rocks. The black smoke of the smudges started the old man's idea about the discomforts of travel. As has been said, it wriggled in his mind.

It had been so with Cronk for about ten years. He was physically conscious of the start of every new thought, as if something twisted inside his skull. For this reason,

he had long ago ceased to encourage new ideas. He did not like the sensation.

"Good day," he said.

"Good day," returned Remie Cherette.

"Ye're French, I reckon," said the old man.

Cherette admitted it with a nod.

"Cal'late to stop here or hereabouts?"

"Yes. You 'ave some good farm to sell?"

"Sell a farm? Sure! Glad to have a neighbor on the lake. Lashin's of elbow room round here. Extry special land, too, an' fish an' fur an' meat a plenty. There's worse places nor Snowshoe Lake; but it be a wonder to me ye'd travel in fly time—aye, a livin' wonder! Ye must 'a' been dead sot on makin' a move. Where'd ye come from?"

"Nort'," replied Remie Cherette; and then he turned away and spoke to Adelard, the older of his two sons.

Peter Cronk was not easily abashed. He seated himself comfortably on a folded and corded tent, filled and lit his rank old pipe, and regarded the newcomers and their belongings with undisguised interest. His curiosity was keenly aroused, but he tried to ignore it. He tried not to wonder where they had come from and why they had come, for wondering about a new thing is bound to start new ideas. He wanted to accept these strangers without question, and so save his brain from that unpleasant sensation of wriggling.

He counted five of them, and four canoes. The man with whom he had spoken was evidently the husband of the older woman and the father of the young man, the boy, and the younger woman. They were fine-looking people, without an exception,

though their faces and hands were puffed and badly marked by fly bites.

"Don't go an' make camp here," said Peter. "Ye'd be et up here, the same as ye've been all along. There's high land an' clearances right handy—two clearances; an' you folks might as well have one of 'em as nobody at all. There's a house on it, too, good as ever it was, but for a hole or two in the roof."

In his awkwardly limited English, Remie Cherette expressed his pleasure at this information. Then he turned to his family and spoke fluently and at considerable length in the language of Quebec. Though Cronk knew something of the French of the woods, the newcomer talked so fast that the old man did not catch a word. He did not try very hard, of course; for just as a person with a tender tooth avoids molasses candy, and a man with a weak stomach denies himself pork and beans, so did Peter Cronk avoid mental effort whenever it was possible to do so. A pig's life! Yes, but it is astounding to see what sort of existence humans can become accustomed to and tolerant of.

Such articles as had been put ashore were restowed in the canoes, and the canoes were manned and pushed off. Remie walked with the old man, and the canoes followed slowly, close inshore. The rocks thinned and soon gave place to fine sand. Where trickles of water crossed from the overhanging woods to the lake, blue clay was visible.

"Here we be," said Cronk, after they had gone a mile. "There lays Sam's dug-out, paddles an' all, jist how he left 'em three weeks back. Here's a good landin', an' here's Sam's track up the bank to his clearance."

He turned and signaled the canoes to come ashore. His companion asked him where this man Sam had gone.

"To where neither frost nor drought doth destroy, nor wolverine nor b'ar busts through an' steals, I reckon," he answered. "I dug Sam's grave. I was parson an' sextant."

"So! Dead! An' 'is son?"

"Nary a son nor daughter nor widdy. If there was ever a man without a family, it was pore Sam Kell; an' he was deaf an' dumb into the bargain."

Cherette inquired concerning the ownership of the late Sam's land and house, and was informed that as poor Sam had left

neither heir nor will, and had never taken out a deed for his hundred acres, the property was nobody's or anybody's. The newcomer got only the general drift of this, so little was his English; and old Cronk, clapping his head in front and behind with both hands to stop the wriggling of thought, refused to say more on the subject. So the canoes came to land, and the five Cherettes followed the old man up the steep path to the deserted clearing.

There it lay, fully twenty acres in extent, irregular in form, and walled around by the high forest. The forest showed maple as well as spruce, and here and there the pale glimmer of a great white birch. There were golden birches, too, mighty of girth, and rampicks of pine towering bone gray above the green, like ghosts of a heroic past.

Remie Cherette noted these things at a glance, and knew that the land was good. He saw, too, that the big clearance was not all of the same age. There were smooth expanses of strong grass and last year's stubble, which had been plowed and harrowed many times. There were rougher plowed areas, and rough land that had never felt the tearing colter and turning share. There were also patches of old stumps ready to be twitched out, and stumps of only a few years' weathering.

"Pore Sam was a busy man till the rheumatiz got 'im bad," said Peter.

Remie nodded, and said something complimentary about the dead man's industry, for well he knew the labor entailed in carving fields out of green forest.

The house of which Cronk had spoken proved to be nothing more than a small cabin of logs, with half the roof fallen in. It stood within fifty yards of the top of the wooded bank, with a log barn on its right, and half a dozen stacks of hay and straw behind the barn.

The broken roof and the stacks of fodder astonished the Cherettes. Remie questioned Peter Cronk in halting English.

"The roof fell in quite a spell back, an' Sam come over an' lived with me," explained the old man. "That was easier 'n mendin' the roof. As for them stacks of hay an' straw, an' all this here clearin' of brush—well, Sam had some queer notions an' fancies. If it hadn't been for the rheumatiz gittin' him worse an' worse the last ten years, he'd 'a' had a hundred acres chopped out an' burned an' stumped. It

was a caution. His live stock was one hoss an' two cows an' two three young cattle an' a roarin' red bull; but he'd make hay enough every year for fifteen head. I uster take some of it off his hands, an' the deer come out an' et it wintertimes, but it growed on him. He had a cravin' for plenty of feed."

"Your friend Sam must have been a grand farmer, and this is a grand place. I am willing to pay for it," said Remie Cherette in his own tongue.

Cronk caught the idea and replied:

"Help yerself."

So the Cherettes settled on Snowshoe Lake. There were Remie and his wife Marie, aged about forty, and Adelard and Jeanne and the boy Paul. Adelard was as tall as his father, though not so broad, and twenty years of age. Jeanne was a pretty, slender girl of seventeen; and the youngest, Paul, was a well grown lad of fifteen.

Peter Cronk admired them one and all. He remained with them all that first day, watching them unload the big canoes, and pitch a tent, and clear the wreckage out of the cabin. They seemed to have plenty of everything, and everything good.

Peter tried not to ask himself why people who could afford such a grand outfit had come to Snowshoe Lake. He wanted to accept them and enjoy their company without question, for his poor head's sake. His only objection to Sam Kell as a companion had been the mental distress caused by Sam's peculiar faculty of stimulating thought. Yes, Sam had been like that, despite his deafness and dumbness—suggesting problems with gestures and looks, always questioning sky and flood and field with his intense gaze, often questioning his companion with a stub of pencil and a scrap of paper. Dull questions can be easily ignored, but Sam's had never been dull.

The old man hoped earnestly that these people from the north would not prove to be as stimulating to the mind as poor Sam had been. He wanted company, human companionship, but he did not want thought that touched deeper than the surface of observation and sensation. He went home that night and tried to fall asleep without thinking of the Cherettes—without wondering why they had left wherever they had come from, why they had traveled in fly time, and what could be the reason for that queer look in their fine eyes.

He was not entirely successful. That wrong spot in his brain writhed and twisted several times before sleep came to him.

After old Peter Cronk had gone, the Cherettes talked about him in their own tongue. Remie said that in his opinion the old man's heart was all right, but his head was all wrong. He went on to say that the old man's dead friend had evidently been queer, too, though a first-rate farmer.

"Which comes of not having a family. Single men in the woods all grow queer. Did you notice the old man's look of pain, which I think was not of limbs or body, and the manner in which he pressed his hands to his head, front and back? It is sad. And what he told of the dead man, Sam—that is strange. The dead man had a craving for cleared land, and for hay and straw, and yet he had not the need for much. There was a reason for that, as there is a reason for everything."

"The old man wonders, I think, what can be our reason for coming to this place," said the wife and mother; "but he is kind—that is easily to be seen. This is a pleasant place, and I hope we may remain here in peace."

"We should be more likely to find peace in a city," said Adelard. "That is my opinion. Out of the forest—far from black woods and lonely waters—in a street of houses, where lights burn all night. It is only in a city that we shall be left in peace."

"I have considered that," replied the father; "but how can you be sure? The wilderness of black woods and lonely waters has been our home, and the home of our fathers, for hundreds of years."

"A home from which we are surely being chased," returned Adelard.

"Let us hope that we have come far enough this time, and let us pray to the good God for deliverance from our trouble. We can pray with open hearts, for we are innocent."

"It is a curse, then; and was such a curse ever heard of in a city?"

"There are other curses peculiar to great cities, so I have heard and read. Let us hope for the best, and pray!"

II

THE Cherettes were too late to put in a crop that year. There were straggling patches of potatoes near both cabins. They might have sown oats to cut and cure un-

ripened, had there been need of fodder; but there was no need of fodder on Snowshoe Lake, so well had Sam Kell provided.

The new settlers mended the roof and chimney of the cabin, and then set to work at felling timber for an addition to the dwelling. While Remie and the older son chopped and limbed among the tall spruces at the back of the clearance, Jeanne and Paul fished the lake and the brook. There were big gray trout in Snowshoe and speckled trout in the stream—thousands upon thousands of them, and all hungry. Bottom fishing, trolling, and fly fishing—it was all fine sport for Jeanne and Paul; but the sport was not the only thing they were after. The father made a small smoke-house of bark, and in it a slow fire of hardwood chips; and there the surplus of each day's catch was hung to cure.

Peter Cronk, who seemed to have nothing to do at home, joined the Cherettes almost every morning, and usually stayed with them until sundown. Sometimes he worked with the axmen, and sometimes he sat at the door of the cabin and watched Mme. Churette at her cooking; but usually he went fishing with Jeanne and Paul.

He talked a good deal, and always as if in spite of his better judgment. Occasionally he began a question, but he never finished one. Frequently he sat for an hour with his head clasped fore and aft in his thin hands. Most of his talk was thoughtless—mere babble about the land and the weather, not worth listening to, and produced without effort, as if he worked his tongue entirely for the satisfaction that he himself derived from the sound of it; but now and then he said something worth hearing, only to clasp his head in his hands immediately afterward, or to walk away.

When the timber was felled and cut into the required lengths, Peter appeared with two horses and a twitching-chain. One horse was the elderly nag that poor Sam Kell had left behind him. When the job of twitching was completed, Peter handed the horses over to Remie Churette.

"It ain't often I use a hoss," he said. "One was Sam's, anyhow. You take the two of 'em; an' ye may's well have Sam's horned critters, too. It 'll save me milkin' an' fetchin' milk acrost. They goes with the place, anyhow."

Remie was pleased, and he asked what was to pay. The old man shook his head. He did not know how much the animals

were worth, or who actually owned them, now that poor Sam was no more; and he did not want to think about it. He shook his head and waved a hand.

"Help yerself," he said.

The cattle ran the woods, Cronk and Kell animals in one herd, captained by the red bull. Up to now, old Peter had hunted for and brought in the three cows every evening, and milked them every night and morning. The hunting was hard work, for the cattle wandered far at their feeding; and there was no dog on Snowshoe, or anywhere nearer than Dell Bright's place on Oxbow Brook, sixteen miles away. Peter's dog had died of old age two years ago.

Now that the Cherettes were responsible for two of the three cows, Peter promised himself a life of ease. He felt that he had already given too much of his life to the demands of pesky critters—to mowing and milking, running the woods in the dark, feeding guzzling calves through his fingers, scalding milk pails, and churning; and to what end? Butter and beef; and as the nearest market for these commodities was thirty-five miles away by paddle and portage, he had to eat them himself or waste them.

He was sick of butter; and venison is more tasty than beef, and more easily come by. He was a woodsman, not a farmer, content to "live on the gun" like an Indian. All this bother and foolishness with cows and calves had been poor Sam's idea.

Having shifted the responsibility of the dead man's cattle to the big Frenchman's broad shoulders, Peter hurried home, roped three frisky calves together, dragged them back, and presented them to Marie Churette. She was charmed with the old man's generosity.

"I'm dead sick of havin' my fingers sucked off'n me," said Peter.

He was so well pleased with having rid himself of most of his responsibilities that he offered to accompany young Paul on the hunt for the cows that night, to put him wise to a few of their habits and favorite retreats—but that night only; so he spent the afternoon with the Cherettes, and he and the fifteen-year-old boy set out before supper. The younger a Churette, the more English language, of sorts, he possessed, and Paul could talk it almost as well as old Cronk himself. He asked questions as they moved at a good pace in the deepening twilight of the forest.

"Why you come on Snowshoe, mister?" asked the lad.

"Dunno," replied the old man, refusing to think.

"Born 'ere, maybe?"

"Nope—not on yer life!"

"Live 'ere long time?"

"Ye said it."

This sort of thing did not bother Peter. He could keep up his end of such a conversation for hours without any mental effort or discomfort.

"Plenty wolves on dis country, mister?" inquired Paul.

"I ain't saw a wolf in years an' years. Tain't wolf country, nor never was, I guess. They come down from Canada about once in a blue moon."

"Blue moon? Never seen 'im. See red moon—yes, an' yellin' an' white. Blue moon? What you call dat?"

"Manner of speakin'—a durned long time."

"I git ye, mister. Very queer, I t'ink so! Plenty wolves on Quebec—same woods like dis New Brunswick; same water; same deer to eat; same flies on summertime an' same snow on wintertime—same everyt'ing. Very queer! Why don't de wolf run 'ere an' breed 'ere, same as nort'?"

The old man showed signs of distress and quickened his pace. Across a shoulder he replied that he did not know and did not care.

"Leave it at that!" he added.

The lad trod close at his heels. For five minutes they slipped through the underbrush without a word; then Paul Churette spoke again, and again it was a question.

"You ever see *loup-garou* on dis country, mister?"

The old man heard, but he did not understand. If he had ever before heard the word *loup-garou*, he had forgotten it; but he had heard many strange names given to ordinary animals and birds by wandering men from Quebec. This was the French for porcupine, or skunk, or mink, as likely as not. Well, he did not care what it was.

"Lashin's of 'em," he replied, keeping up his brisk pace.

He felt a strong hand on his shoulder. It halted him, and he turned in astonishment. Young Churette stood close to him, now holding him with both hands; and though dusk was already deep beneath the great trees, he saw a flame of excitement in the lad's face and eyes.

"Lashin's!" cried the lad. "You say plenty? Plenty *loup-garou*?"

"What of it?" returned the old man, ruffled and startled. "This here Snowshoe country's good enough for *louns-garous* or any other wild critters, I reckon. It's the best fur country in the world!"

"Fur country? Ah, you do not comprehend what I speak—de word I say—*loup-garou*. You give 'im not the same word, maybe. You do not call 'im a fur beast—not if you know 'im!"

"Ye're right—I never heard of no sich critter. What is it?"

Quick as a flash the boy crossed himself, muttering a devout phrase or two in the language of his ancestors. There was fear in his eyes, which the old man saw.

"Man an' wolf!" whispered Paul Churette. "Wolf an' man—sometime on two foot, sometime on four. A cursed man—cursed an' sold to devils; but not all 'uman on two foot, nor all wolf on four foot. You shoot 'im, dat big wolf, an' nothin' 'appen. Adelard try one night—but *mon père* don't know. You don't tell *mon père*—de ol' man—no. It make 'im mad, 'cause 'e say, 'No, my sons, don't shoot at 'im—never!' But it is said you git bullet of silver an' *monsieur le curé* to bless it, an' you kill dat wolf."

Peter Cronk felt a creeping chill at the base of his scalp. He had run the woods by night as by day for a lifetime, at all seasons, armored by familiarity against its dark hints of strange menaces, aware only of its physical difficulties and perils; but now he glanced fearfully around him at the crowding shapes of blackness.

The man wolf—yes, he had heard of something of the kind, long ago. A French breed had spoken of it, and in a lumber camp, long ago, a Swede had told him a similar tale. He had also heard of other creatures of the wilderness that were not constituted according to the normal laws of nature; but as he had never seen one of them, he had never felt apprehensive concerning any of them—until now. Now he felt afraid—afraid of nothing—right here in his own woods.

"No, I don't believe it!" he exclaimed, turning and resuming his advance into the deepening gloom.

Young Churette followed close. By this time the old man was moving at a jog trot, in an unconscious attempt to escape a new fear and new thoughts. Questions started

in his mind, and the tender spot in his brain began to twitch; and as he ran he pressed his hands to his head, front and back.

It was not long before he tripped on a root and fell flat. Bushes and moss broke the force of his fall, and beyond a slight breathlessness and dizziness he was none the worse for it. The youth helped him to his feet.

"Hark! Did ye hear it?" he asked, his voice thin and unsteady for lack of breath.

"What?" queried the lad, in a voice even thinner and more shaky than Peter's.

"The clank of the bell. It's Kate, the old she devil! She'd hold on to the clapper just for the fun of makin' a fool of me, if her hoofs was hands!"

Paul's sigh of relief came all the way from the heart. His talk of *louis-garous* had rubbed his own nerves as well as the old man's. They found the bell cow, stirred her up, and drove her homeward. The other cows and the younger cattle followed the clanking of the bell.

"Good t'ing to carry a lantern," suggested the lad, as they stumbled through the tangles in the wake of the cow.

"Ye're wrong," returned Peter. "Kerosene's hard to come by, with the nearest store thirty mile off; an' there's Sam's red bull to consider into the bargain. I toted a lantern one dark night, but never agin in these woods—not for a pound of fancy smokin'!"

"What 'appen?"

"The pesky red bull, that's what. Fust thing I knowed, something went past me like the devil on hossback, with a snort an' a grunt, an' the lantern went out of my hand an' derved near took a finger along with it. Never agin! That bull don't like lanterns."

"Where is 'e now, dat red bull?"

"Somewheres behind ye, an' not far away. Him an' the young cattle will follow the cows to the edge of the clearance. He's a peaceable critter when he don't happen to see something he don't like or don't understand."

Paul looked behind him as he quickened his pace, but could see nothing but the looming shadows in pitch black and a lesser black. He could hear the passage of the cattle through the underbrush, however, only a few yards away. For a time the thought of the proximity of the red bull took his mind off more fearsome but less immediate perils of the night.

In trying to look backward while moving swiftly forward, he fell twice. Each time he fell heavily against the man in front of him. Peter swore at him after the second thump.

"What ails yer feet?" cried the old man. "Quit ridin' up my neck, will ye? What's eatin' ye?"

"Maybe the red bull don't understand me," said the lad.

"The bull, is it? Ye got nought to fear from him, I reckon. Keep off'n my heels, that's all! Ye give me the fidgets, knockin' me down an' walkin' on me!"

The lad apologized, and the march was resumed. Presently they reached a brush fence with a gap and bars in it. The old man lowered the bars, and through the gap went the bell cow, followed—after a little persuasion with a stick—by two other cows.

"Put up the bars," ordered the old man.

Paul stooped to obey, then straightened his back again, having thought better of it. Why shut out the animals from these acres and acres of good feed, and run the black woods for them every night, when there was more than enough hay left over from past years to keep them through the next winter. He left the bars on the ground, and the gap open, and hurried after Cronk through the stumps and over grassy humps.

"I leave de bars lay," he said. "Leave 'em all feed on the clearance. Plenty feed for nex' winter. Save 'unt de woods every night. Good idea, yes?"

The old man halted and stood stock-still for half a minute, with both hands pressed to his head.

"I could 'a' thought of it, only I don't think any more 'n I got to," he said at last. "I keep doin' things the same old way. It's been so this twelve year back. New ideas plays the devil with my head, an' that's a fact! But it wasn't always like that."

Paul expressed polite concern; and they hurried forward to overtake the cows and head them away from Cronk's place and toward the Churette cow yard. They were within a hundred yards of the lighted cabin when the lad laid a hand on the old man's arm and warned him in an earnest voice not to mention the subject of *louis-garous* to Remie or any other member of the family.

Cronk halted and faced his companion.

The tender spot in the old man's brain was wriggling, and he felt desperate.

"Why not?" he asked fretfully.

After a moment's reflection, Paul replied:

"It make 'em feel bad. It scare 'em. I tell you de trut' now, mister. We run away from one *loup-garou*!"

III

OLD Peter Cronk could not let such a statement as that pass unquestioned, even if the answer should burst his poor brain. He would learn more about the family of Cherette running away from one of those man-wolf things, if it cost him his reason. So, while *madame* and Remie and Adelard were milking and Jeanne was in the cabin, he drew Paul aside and demanded further information concerning the cause of their flight from the north. The tender spot in his brain was wriggling, but so masterful was his curiosity that he was scarcely aware of the cerebral disturbance.

This is what he heard, though these are not exactly the words of Paul Cherette:

Long ago, in the old days, a Cherette committed a great cruelty, and for it had a curse laid upon him. There are different stories concerning the nature of the crime and the identity of the victim, and it is probable that no one of them is the exact truth.

One version of the matter is that the victim of that early Cherette's inhuman cruelty was a beautiful Indian girl, the daughter of a wizard, and that the curse was pronounced by her father. Noel Cherette was a great warrior and *coureur des bois* and the right-hand man of a powerful seigneur. He transacted business for his lord in the little town of Quebec; and it was there, within the ramparts of the upper town, that a sentry saw a large wolf slinking and prowling one night.

It was a moonlit night. The alarm was given, and armed men chased the wolf. The beast could not escape from the walled town, and it was seen to run into the porch of a house. Its pursuers followed close, with pikes and muskets ready; but no wolf was there. In the porch stood Noel Cherette, breathing heavily and trembling from head to foot.

They asked where the wolf had gone, and he replied that he had not seen a wolf. They tried the door behind him, only to find that it was locked and barred on the inside. Then one of the soldiers, slightly

in liquor, accused Noel Cherette, that seasoned warrior, of being the wolf himself.

Cherette snatched away his accuser's musket, clubbed it, and killed the fellow at a blow. He was overpowered, imprisoned, speedily tried, and condemned to death. He was marched outside the walls to be shot. He fell to his knees, and then sped away toward the edge of the forest—a wolf running on the snow! A panicky volley was fired. The wolf continued to leap forward, but on three legs instead of four, and disappeared into the forest.

Two days later Pierre Cherette heard a knocking on his door, which was eighty miles from the town; and upon opening it, he beheld Noel Cherette, his cousin. Noel's left hand was badly wounded, as if it had been pierced and shattered by a musket ball. Pierre was astonished, for the last thing he had looked for was a visit from this cousin, who was the great man of the family, and whose home was two hundred miles away on the seigneurie of Montbazou. He made him welcome, however, bathed and dressed the wounded hand, and set the best in the house before him.

This Pierre was a man of very different character from Noel. He was rough and solitary in his habits, and nothing of a courtier. His small house of logs was the only habitation in a valley that had long ago been surrendered by humanity, white and red, to the creations of an ancient wizardry. It was his independent spirit that had brought him there and kept him there, for in that valley there was neither tax nor tithe to pay, nor service nor fealty to render or acknowledge to any lord. Ambition held him, too; for should he remain there ten years, and clear and cultivate a prescribed area, the whole valley would be his, for himself and his heirs forever.

He had taken precautions against the dark dangers of that remote region in the form of half a dozen silver bullets, all of which had been blessed by a priest. He had brought two muskets to the valley, one of which always stood in a corner of the cabin, loaded with an extra charge of powder and with one of the silver balls, primed and ready. The other he carried abroad for the discharge of leaden missiles at moose and deer and bear and wolf; but always, in a convenient pocket, he had five of the silver bullets in a leather pouch.

Noel's explanation of his wound has been forgotten. The hand healed quickly

and cleanly under Pierre's treatment. In six or seven days it was well, but still Noel said nothing about returning to Montbazon. He was not the same talkative and light-hearted cousin that Pierre had known years before. He would sit for hours without a word, with an elbow on a knee and his head bowed on his uninjured hand; but there seemed to be nothing wrong with him physically. He had an astonishing appetite, a revolting appetite. Again and again he snatched the half cooked venison from the gridiron, tore it savagely with his teeth, and swallowed it in unchewed lumps, deaf to Pierre's horrified protests.

He did this thing once too often. One night, when the wind was howling outside and harsh snow swished along the walls, he pushed his cousin aside from the hearth, grabbed the raw meat, and tore at it. Then Pierre lost his temper, pushed the other in return, and called him a beast and a pig. His anger and disgust gaining head, he snatched the meat from Noel's hands and teeth and flung it on the floor.

Then terrible things happened. Noel Cherette snarled and drew his lips back from pointed fangs. His eyes lit with a red glare. His forehead receded, and the lower part of his face shot out. He stooped, still snarling. He dropped on all fours.

Pierre leaped back, plucked the emergency musket from its place with shaking hands, leveled it as the great wolf sprang at him, and pulled the trigger. When the smoke had cleared away, Pierre looked—and there lay the corpse of his cousin Noel.

On the next day, after setting fire to the cabin, Pierre Cherette fled from the valley. Forty years later, an old man, he appeared at Montbazon and told Noel's widow of her husband's death.

The curse was not dead. It fell again, two generations later. A Cherette inherited it when grown to manhood, attacked a brother with his teeth, and, when pulled away by his father and another brother, fled to the woods on four feet.

Yet again, a generation after that, a Cherette felt the terrible thing coming upon him, and took his own life in order to escape it; but the curse of the old Indian wizard still lived. Remie's brother Roger, Paul's uncle, was now the innocent inheritor—but no less terrible because of his innocence. It had first overtaken him ten years ago.

Jeanne called them to supper.

"You don't tell nobody what I tell to-night," the lad cautioned the old man.

Peter Cronk's queer brain behaved very badly during supper, and it was all he could do to apply his hands to his head and at the same time to make out a square meal. The Cherettes were sympathetic, and Remie suggested numerous remedies.

"No good," said Peter. "It was thinkin' done it—wore somethin' raw, I reckon—an' nought 'll cure it till I quit thinkin'. 'Twas a caution the way I uster think—think an' think about this an' that an' t'other in this world, an' in heaven an' hell into the bargain, havin' nothin' better to do. It must be all of ten year ago it give the first wiggle. There's somethin' of a buzz about it, too, like a bee in a bottle; an' now every time I think a thunk, or light on a new idee—hell!"

"Quit t'inkin'," suggested Remie.

"I does, for days on end; but it ain't so easy for a man like me—a thinkin' man. Theré was poor Sam Kell, too, always writin' about himself an' nater an' fate an' God Almighty on little bits of paper, an' chasin' me around to poke the same under my nose for an answer. An' now it's yerself. It ain't so easy for a man with a brain like me to quit thinkin' entirely all the time."

Mme. Cherette felt so sorry for Cronk that she gave him a stiff shot of rare old brandy. He went home immediately after that, hoping to get to sleep quickly on the glow and tingle of the strong liquor; but nothing of the kind happened. He lay wide awake in his bunk for hours, ridden and spurred by thoughts. Questions that refused to be ignored, and answers to them which excited but failed to satisfy, continued to agitate his poor brain despite his desperate efforts of will to put man wolves and wolf men and the family of Cherette out of his mind.

At last he sat up, lit his pipe, and resigned himself unreservedly to thought. As his fool brain would not be quiet, had not sense enough to know what was good for it, then he would give it just cause to writhe and buzz.

The Cherettes had run away from a *loup-garou*, and that *loup-garou* was Remie Cherette's own brother! These were the amazing facts which refused to be blinked. Paul had told him so; and Paul was undoubtedly a smart, honest, and knowledgeable lad. A man can laugh at some of the mysterious horrors of the wilderness which

woodsmen tell of, and obviously lie about, such as the windigo with blood-smeared footprints as big as a one-horse pung, or the Dungarvan whooper of the Miramichi, with its unholy yowling across frosty forests, or the indefinite but devilish lunkum-soo of the Tobique; but they cannot laugh at creatures running on four paws that were born of women, that are human in their childhood and early manhood, and that resume the human form and speech every now and then to the ends of their accursed lives. No, a man cannot make light of such pitiful and terrible and damned creatures as *louns-garous*! Ghosts and devils are jokes beside them.

Peter left the bunk, lit the lantern, and closed and barred the door. His nerves were behaving in such an extraordinary manner that he gave no heed to the queer spot in his brain. He glanced fearfully at the little window, then closed it and hung a blanket across it. This *loup-garou*, this horrible confusion of man and beast, had him shivering. The night was sultry, and, with door and window closed, the cabin was like an oven; but he did not mind the heat.

"I'm scairt," he admitted, wiping sweat from his brow with shaking hand. "It ain't like me, neither; but them *garou* critters—an' Remie Cherette's own brother one of 'em—an' them runnin' away from it, an' quittin' a good farm, like as not—who wouldn't be scairt?"

He lit a fire in the little cast-iron box of a stove, boiled water, and made tea. He felt that his heart needed cheering and his nerves steady. The heat increased, but he did not notice it. While his skin perspired, his blood ran chill and his old bones shivered. If the sore spot in his brain wriggled, he was not aware of it. He crouched at the table, close to the lantern, and gulped the hot tea.

And now another fear was added to the new terror of the outer darkness.

"This ain't like me," he murmured. "Maybe it's a warnin'. Maybe it's a mortal sickness comin' on, for I be full of years an' uselessness!"

The thought of his increasing age frightened and depressed him, for it was a new thought. He had suffered physical hurt many times in his long woodland life, and pain from exposure and fatigue more than once, and the queer discomfort in his head for years; but never before had he felt the

chills and lassitude of fever. Never before had he seriously contemplated that daunting fact, the mortality of man, with a personal application. Never before had he felt fear of anything but the ordinary and natural perils of a life in the woods, which were easily enough avoided by the cautious and experienced; but now he was afraid of a thing he had never seen—a man wolf—and of a thing he had never before given a thought to—death.

He huddled over the little table, blinking at the feeble flame of the lantern. He drank more hot tea; and still he shivered.

Presently his memories became as clear as glass and as bright as pictures painted on glass and held up before a bright flame. They were true, but they possessed a strange, high-colored quality of unreality. He saw his own boyhood again, and his parents and brothers and sisters. He saw the old farm, and the endless toil which it demanded in return for scanty crops. He saw his father after a tree had fallen on him, and after the doctors had done all that could be done—a bent, crooked shape in a great chair, strong of heart and bright of eye, but unable to move hand or foot.

"I hadn't ought to 'a' cleared out," he muttered. "I'd ought to 'a' stopped an' done my share!"

He saw himself living only for himself, and giving as little in return for that living as was humanly possible. He had worked hard at times, but never for longer than he could help—and never so much as a stroke of an ax for any one but himself, in those days. He remembered a logging camp, and a big yellow-bearded man who told queer stories that he had heard from his father, about witches and wizards and all manner of strange creatures in a queer old country far across the ocean.

One of those long forgotten tales flashed back to Peter now, bright and clear and terrifying. It was about a rich and cruel baron, owner of miles of farms and forests, who had a curse laid on him by an old woman for an act of unbelievable cruelty. Two days later, while playing with his only son in the great hall of his castle, he turned into a wolf, and killed the innocent child with his teeth. Then, struggling madly and howling and screaming in two terrible voices, he took on human shape again, snatched a boar spear from the wall, and drove the long blade into his own heart.

That was the story, forgotten for years,

but now as clear as fire. The yellow-bearded chopper had called the cruel baron a werewolf, but he was a *loup-garou*, like those cursed Cherettes. The world was full of them, perhaps, under one name or another, despite the fact that Peter Cronk had never seen one.

And now he remembered a French half-breed, a man with a gold ring in one ear and a cast in one eye, who had appeared from the woods, remained with him for a week, and then disappeared into the woods. That had been years and years ago, before the arrival of poor Sam Kell, but right here on Snowshoe Lake. Peter had forgotten that half-breed, but now Louis Benoist came back to him as bright as paint, thin lips and cocked eye and gold earring and everything, as if he had not been gone a day. Queer thing, that! Old Cronk had not given Louis a thought in twenty years, and now he could see him and hear him without even shutting his eyes.

The half-breed had talked a great deal, and eaten a great deal, and drunk up all the gin; and in those days one had to make a forty-mile journey and six portages to get a bottle of "squareface." At the time, Peter had considered Louis's talk to be masterly efforts of a wild and wicked imagination, but now he realized that much of it had been true.

There sat the half-breed on the other side of the little table, within a yard of the smoky lantern, rolling a cigarette and looking at Peter with one eye and off into a corner with the other. He had shaved tobacco from Peter's plug and rubbed it very fine, and now he rolled it in a little square of thin paper. He turned for a moment and ignited a splinter of dry pine at the draft of the stove. Then he lit the cigarette, drew the smoke deep, and exhaled it through his thin, high nose. It was as real as life. Peter stared, dully wondering.

Now Louis was telling one of his amazing adventures. It was his adventure with the stream driver who never smiled, away up on the headwaters of the St. Maurice, in the spring of the year. The drive had passed on, leaving just the two of them to keep that crooked bit of snarling water clear until the last stick of timber had wallowed through. There was not much to do, but when there was anything to do it was jump and jab and pry for your life. They slept in a little tent, with plenty of blankets.

One morning Louis awoke at dawn, and found a big wolf standing over him. He let out a yell and grabbed it by the neck with both hands. He saw its eyes then—and they were the eyes of the unsmiling stream driver.

When old Peter Cronk awoke, sunshine was showing around the edges of the blanket across the window and under the door. He felt as weak as water, and every bone in him, great and small, ached as if it had been beaten. He staggered to the door and unbarred and opened it. He pulled the blanket away from the window. Then he examined the floor around the legs of the table, searching for cigarette ashes. Nothing of the kind was to be found.

He crawled out and down to his spring, lay flat, and drank till he could hold no more. Then he crawled back to the cabin and into the bunk.

"I be mortal sick," he murmured. "I've lived a long time—an' all to myself. I'd ought to 'a' stayed an' helped 'em out back home. I'd 'a' been better company for poor Sam Kell but for the wriggle in my head. I ain't done no harm to folks—nor no good. I was a mite too ha'sh, maybe, with that half-breed for drinkin' all the gin. I hadn't ought to 'a' called him a liar, neither—nor let him walk away feelin' mean."

Sleep came to him suddenly.

IV

OLD Peter Cronk was dangerously ill for three days; and for a week after that he was sick enough to continue to worry about his sins, which were almost entirely of omission.

Paul Cherette nursed him, remaining close at hand both day and night, when the fever was at its worst. All the Cherettes were deeply concerned for him. Remie searched the woods for certain herbs, from which he brewed a medicinal tea which made the sweat hop out on the old man. Adelard shot a fat cock partridge, from which Mme. Cherette made a delicious broth for the invalid. They waited on him and fed him until he was up and around again.

"It was a warnin'," he said to Paul one day, when he was sufficiently recovered to go fishing. They were on Lame Squaw Brook, reclined on warm moss, taking life easily. "Look at me now, lad, an' ye see

a different man altogether. I ain't sayin' my face be different, only thinner. The change is inside. In all my life I never done no good to any one but myself—nothin' to notice, anyhow, an' kinder grudgin' the trouble at that; but now I feel a hankerin' to lend a hand. If poor Sam Kell was alive now, with his little pencil an' paper, him bein' deaf an' dumb but full of questions, I'd sure treat him more sociable than what I did. If that half-breed was to come agin—him I told ye about—I wouldn't leave him go away agin with only five pound of salt meat an' a pinch of tea. I'd ask him to stop as long as he wanted to; an' if he was sot on goin', I'd give him all the grub he could tote an' my blessin' into the bargain. That's what bein' sick done to me. Lad, I was reel low, an' agin an' agin I see what a well man couldn't see. There was my poor pa in his chair, a lookin' at me kinder hopeless; an' there was Sam, wantin' to ask me somethin', only he couldn't find pencil nor paper; an' Louis Benoist steppin' in an' out the door sort of uneasy. An' that wasn't all. All them afflicted folks of yer own kin ye told me about—them *louns-garous*—come in an' took a look at me, one time or another. They was visitations. The hull works was a warnin'."

"A warnin'?" queried Paul anxiously. "What for? What about?"

"Death an' damnation."

"You mean—de *loup-garou*?"

"I mean it was a warnin' to change my heart an' my selfish ways."

"Yes—I don't know dat. You say you see de *loup-garou*? 'Ow many?"

"It was all in my own sick head, lad. They wasn't really there—the things I see. You was there yerself some of the times I see 'em."

The lad looked very grave.

"It was an old man told us he see Roger before de las' time we see 'im an' run away," he said in a shaking voice. "De old man was sick, too, like you. He t'ink a man come in on 'is cabin, where he lay in de bed, an' turn roun' on two foot an' go out on four foot. He tell Adelard; an' two t'ree mont' go, an' in walk Roger."

Peter eyed the boy keenly for several seconds before replying.

"That may be so, Paul; but what I seen wasn't like that. 'Most all of what appeared to me was things that's laid a long time on my conscience, an' the rest was

things I'd been studyin' over jist before the first chill struck into me. There's one fact ye kin bank on, lad—nothin' like that 'll ever trouble ye here on Snowshoe Lake. Louis—that's the breed I told ye about—he told men how them *louns-garous* never run 'cept where wolves run. He knowed all about the critters."

Paul looked doubtfully at the old man, and was not assured. Peter Cronk was a poor liar.

"Ye be safe here on Snowshoe," resumed Peter. "Ye be as safe as if ye was inside a meetin' house. This here Roger, now—yer pa's brother—did ye ever see him when he—wasn't a man?"

The boy's reply was long yet fragmentary, circumstantial and earnest, and to the excited mind of the old man at once convincing and confusing. Paul himself, it seemed, had never seen this Roger Churette in any other but his human form; but even so, standing on two legs, talking in a human voice, and smoking a pipe, he had always looked more like a wolf than a man to Paul. He was older than Remie, that Roger, but not so tall and broad. He had pointed teeth and queer eyes.

In his younger days he had gamed and reveled away two farms and twenty head of horned cattle. Then he had lived with his brother a whole summer long, lazing around the kitchen all day or going fishing; and with the first frost he had borrowed money from Remie and gone to Montreal. That had been in the fourth year of Paul's life. The boy did not remember it, but Adelard had told him all about it.

Uncle Roger had turned up again the following June, with his eyes queerer-looking than ever and his teeth more pointed. He demanded more money, but Remie had told him to work like an honest man, for a change. The two brothers had gone into a room by themselves, shut the door, and remained there half an hour. When they came out, Roger was grinning with all his sharp teeth and Remie was trembling and as white as paper. Roger went away that very day, with money in his pocket.

In the room with the closed door he had confessed a terrifying secret to Remie, in explanation of his inability to work for more than a few weeks at a time. Poor Remie, distracted by fear and pity, told his wife; and Adelard heard it and passed it on to Jeanne and Paul. Roger, it seemed, had inherited the terrible curse

which had first been laid upon Noel Cherette in the old days.

For a week Remie's good heart was torn between pity for his brother and fear for his wife and children; and then fear won. He disposed of his cattle and horses one by one, and at last he sold the farm and house and standing crops all to one purchaser at a great sacrifice. He sent most of the money to Montreal. Then they went away, without telling a living soul the cause of their departure or their plans for the future.

They traveled by railroad and then by wagon, and at last resumed housekeeping at the edge of a little settlement fully three hundred miles distant from their old home. They bought a small house, which they enlarged. Land was cleared, cows and horses were purchased, and four prosperous years went by. Paul was eight years old when, one October night, just after supper, the Cherettes were disturbed by the sounds of a dog fight. Remie opened the door, and there, on the hard ground, for all the family to see, rolled and wrestled their good dog Victor, at deadly grips with another animal as big and shaggy as himself.

Remie looked closer, and saw that Victor's antagonist was a timber wolf of extraordinary size. The wife and children saw the same thing, and screamed. Remie grabbed a stick of dry maple from the wood box beside the stove, and leaped into the fray, furious but silent. He struck at the wolf until it loosed its hold, tore free from the dog's grip, and sped away into the darkness. Victor was for following, but Remie held him back. They dressed the good dog's wounds, which were deep.

Bright and early on the morning of the third day after that, into the kitchen walked Roger Cherette. He limped slightly, held his head stiffly above bandages of linen wrapped around from collar bone to chin, and showed a swollen lip and bruises on brow and cheek. Victor jumped at him; and Remie and Adelard had all they could do to drag the good dog away and push him out of the kitchen. Then Remie, white of face, told the wife and children to step outside.

Twenty minutes later Remie came out, took hold of the excited dog by the collar, and held him tight; and then the brother appeared and limped off toward the nearest point of woods. Remie had bought him off again.

Late in the season as it was, the Cherettes sold out again and moved on. They went two hundred miles, and settled in the black woods. Remie trapped fur all winter, and in the spring they all set to work to cut out a new farm. Adelard, a boy of thirteen, melted silver coins and molded a silver bullet, with the grim intention of begging a blessing for it from the nearest priest and then shooting it into the heart or brain of his uncle at their next meeting; but Remie saw the bullet, suspected the intention, and made both the boys swear that they would never raise a hand against the unfortunate Roger unless a dearer life than his was in deadly peril from him.

Four years later, Roger visited them again. Again he went away with money in his pocket, and again the distracted family moved.

This year the good dog Victor, now old, crawled home one day and died at Remie's feet. His throat was torn terribly—but there was blood on his jaws that was not his own. The family fled then, without awaiting the appearance of the brother and uncle.

Old Peter Cronk did not doubt for a moment that the brother of Remie Cherette was a *loup-garou*; and, in spite of his words of cheer to Paul, he firmly believed that the accursed monster would hunt them down, sooner or later, even here on Snowshoe Lake. The lad's story was proof to him that they would never find a hiding place from Roger Cherette until that terrible creature had taken the life of one of them, or had lost his own.

Peter thought hard over the strange and terrible situation of his friends; and the fact that he did so without the old discomfort in his head was proof enough for him that it was God's will that he was to think. It was his duty, therefore, to think to some purpose. Had he not been visited by sickness and visions and memories for the awaking of his conscience and the good of his soul? He firmly believed so, having a solitary's opinion of his own importance in the Almighty's scheme of things.

Very well, then—he had been afflicted in order that in weakness and fear he might realize the selfish futility of his long past. The weakness and the visions had gone, and now the wriggling sensation in his brain was gone; so what more likely than that health of body and mind had been given back to him, in God's mercy, in order

that he might mend his selfish ways and save his soul? And what more likely than that the Cherettes had been sent to him, in their trouble, as a means to his spiritual salvation?

He saw his duty clearly. It was to save the Cherettes from their unholy and accursed kinsman, and, in so doing, to prove to the Almighty that the divine warning and opportunity had not been offered in vain. People who live by themselves and for themselves, knowing nothing of the crowded world of men, imagining nothing of the world-crowded universe, and reading nothing but the Old Testament, sometimes get such ideas.

V

THE Cherettes fenced in the best of the grass, but the rest of the Kell and Cronk clearances was thrown open to the cattle, as pasture, for that summer. The Cherettes worked at building, fencing, and stumping, and soon had converted the deserted house and the desolate fields into a home.

Peter Cronk visited them once or twice every day, but seldom set a hand to their labors. Instead, he ran the woods day and night—not casually or lightly, but with a keenness and gravity of manner which only Paul, of all his new friends, understood; for Paul alone guessed the old man's purpose. Peter Cronk had taken upon himself the protection of the hunted family from the north.

July, August, and September passed without sight or sound of the dreaded visitor. The potatoes were dug and housed. Peter went down Lame Squaw brook three times a week, for it was from that direction that he expected trouble, reasoning that a *loup-garou*, like a wolf, would run in the tracks of its quarry. The fact that the Cherettes had traveled by canoe, setting foot to ground only at the portages, and that even from the portages their tracks and scent had long since vanished and blown, did not shake his theory, for Roger Cherette's actions in the past proved that a *loup-garou* could follow a trail by some other sense than those of sight and smell.

Every morning, rain or shine, he set out to keep watch and ward, eager and reluctant at the same time, and always afraid; and sometimes he remained on guard until past midnight. His reluctance, his eager

curiosity, and his fear were always greater on Lame Squaw brook than anywhere else.

He did not carry his modern rifle on these tours of duty, but an old double-barreled muzzle-loader that had belonged to Sam Kell; and in each barrel, atop of an extra charge of powder, rested a silver bullet. Peter had molded the bullets from a hidden store of coin; but he doubted their efficiency, for they had not received the sacerdotal blessing. As he dared not absent himself from the neighborhood of the menaced Cherettes for long enough to travel to the nearest church, he could only hope that the will would be accepted for the deed.

The twenty-second day of October was mellow and bright. Peter sat amid yellow ferns on the northwest bank of Lame Squaw, at a distance of about four miles from the foot of the lake. He had finished his midday meal of cold roast venison, a hunk of Mme. Cherette's gingerbread, and three mugs of strong tea, and had extinguished his little fire immediately after the kettle had boiled. Now he sat with his pipe between his sparse teeth and the old gun across his knees, glancing up and down the narrow valley through screens of brush.

Suddenly his glance, which was downstream at the moment, became fixed; and with a desperate effort he got to his feet and stepped forward, gun in hand. He felt a mighty urge to turn and run, but he mastered it.

The intruder was in easy range now, picking his way along the farther edge of the stream in blissful unconsciousness of his peril. He was a tall man, and his high boots, woolen clothing, and heavy cap were those of a bushwhacker. He carried a rifle.

Peter raised the old duck gun to his shoulder, and cocked the right hammer. He was trembling, and his finger trembled on the trigger. He pressed the trigger—but nothing happened. It was not the trigger of the cocked hammer.

As he fumbled with that trembling finger for the right trigger, the stranger turned his head and saw him. The face thus disclosed to Peter's keen old eyes bore not the faintest resemblance to the face of his imaginings and his fearful expectation. He lowered the cocked hammer and took the gun from his shoulder.

The stranger waded across the stream in haste, with his rifle ported and his eyes steady on the motionless old man.

"Good day," he said, halting, still with the rifle in both hands and his glance unwavering.

"Good day to ye," returned Peter, projecting his voice with an effort.

"Is your name Peter Crock, by any lucky chance?"

"Peter Cronk's my name."

"Queer thing! There must be something wrong with my eyes. When I first spotted you, you appeared to have your gun pointed at me."

The old man grinned foolishly and glanced to right and left.

"Ye got me wrong—but yer eyes didn't fool ye," he said confusedly. "The gun was p'inted at ye, an' that's God's truth; but when I see yer face I quit, all of a shiver. I ain't that kind of man. I was lookin' out for somethin' else altogether." He became calmer. "Ye spoke my name, or pretty near it. Was ye lookin' for me?"

"Indeed I was. My guide—Tom Breen—is back at the mouth of this stream. He's battered up pretty badly—no bones broken, I guess—and our outfit's gone. His pole snapped off short in the rapids, and the canoe swung across and broke her back. We had a nasty time of it for a few minutes; but I hung on to my rifle. Tom told me that you and a man named Kell lived away up here on a lake. We need grub and a canoe and blankets."

"Ye don't belong to these parts, I reckon?"

"You are right. I spend a lot of time in the woods, however. I am willing to pay for anything you can let me have."

"D'ye know anything of a Frenchman of the name of Roger Cherette?"

"Never heard of him."

"I kin fit ye out, I reckon. Maybe ye seen a wolf on yer way?"

"A wolf? No—I've been all over this province without ever seeing a wolf. Uncle Henry Braithwaite says that the only wolves in New Brunswick are those in sheep's clothing."

"Maybe so—but I've seen them, once or twice, in their own hides. Did ye see a man downstream that might look like a Frenchman?"

"We haven't seen a human being since we passed the mouth of Oxbow."

"I reckon we may's well move along. We got four mile to go."

They walked in silence for fifteen minutes or so, each busy with his own thoughts.

Tom Breen had told Richard Barnston that Cronk was a queer old lad, and it was now Mr. Barnston's opinion that the ancient woodsman was even queerer than the guide had intimidated.

"Were you waiting for a wolf or a Frenchman?" the sportsman suddenly asked his companion.

Peter turned his head and glanced back for a second, but neither slackened his pace nor answered the question. They continued to advance without another word, the stranger close on the old man's heels, until they were within a few hundred yards of the nearest edge of the clearances. Then Peter halted suddenly and turned. Barnston all but fell over him. They stood eye to eye, toe to toe.

"Ye look all right," said the old man; "so I'll tell ye. Keep it quiet—that's all. Not a word to the family here on Sam's place, nor to Tom Breen, nor to a livin' soul. Ye spied me with this here gun up to my shoulder. Ye asked me whether it was a wolf or a Frenchman I was watchin' out for. It was both of them! Aye, it was the two of them I was all sot to shoot at—*two in one!*"

Barnston was quite sure now that the old man was crazy; and, being a model of politeness, he dissembled with all his skill. His face assumed an expression of profound gravity and sympathetic attention.

"Quite so," he said. "I understand—one with each barrel."

"Ye're wrong!" returned Peter sharply. "Think I be cracked, hey? Well, I ain't. Ye'll maybe have more sense when ye're my age." He laid a hand on the young man's arm. "With one bar'l," he continued, his voice fallen to an unnerving whisper. "The both of them, man an' wolf, at the one shot—that's the idee. They be one thing—the wolf under the human skin, or the man inside the hairy hide!"

Richard Barnston was an educated and enlightened man of thirty years of wide-eyed life; but he felt a suggestion of passing frost on the back of his neck and a sense of unreasoning apprehension in his soul. He glanced uneasily over his shoulder, and saw only the lonely afternoon sunshine on dark boughs and gray stems and crimson leaves.

"Ye've heard of something like that?" queried the old man.

"Like what?"

"Man an' wolf in the same skin."

"I've read of it—yes, and heard of such creatures—werewolves and *louns-garous*—but never in this province. It's an old superstition, ageless and world-wide; but what do you know about it?"

Peter outlined the story that he had heard from the lad Paul.

"Do you believe that?" inquired the sportsman.

"Why wouldn't I believe it? They run away—all the way to Snowshoe Lake from God knows where! What else would they quit their good farms for, if they wasn't scairt off? It wouldn't be trouble with the law that's huntin' them—that's a sure thing, for ye can see their goodness at a glimpse. The lad wouldn't lie, anyhow; but don't tell 'em a word of it, nor say the name of *loup-garou* nor of Roger. It wouldn't do no good, an' might git Paul into trouble."

"I promise not to mention it," said Barnston, now of the opinion that all the people of Snowshoe Lake were more or less crazy.

When the Cherettes, father and sons, first caught sight of old Peter and the stranger, it was as if a breath of frost had touched them and turned them to ice. They were chopping firewood, vigorously limbing out a big rock maple, when they heard sounds of approach in the underbrush, and glanced toward the sounds. Then immobility gripped them. For ten mortal heartbeats they stood staring and unbreathing, Remie with his ax up and back, Adelard with his wedge of steel sunk deep in the wood, and Paul with a great bough in both hands, spellbound in the very act of casting it aside. Their faces were set and gray.

Barnston saw all this, and was startled and impressed. Peter, who also saw it, had expected something of the kind. As soon as he had pulled his wits together, he waved his hand and cried:

"Here be a young man lookin' for grub an' a canoe, havin' lost his outfit an' busted up his guide in Two Devils Rapids."

Now the Cherettes saw the stranger's face, and the blood returned to their own faces. Remie swung his ax lightly into the trunk and let it rest there. Adelard's hands loosed from his ax handle, and young Paul completed the casting aside of the bough.

A great sigh of relief welled from Remie's mighty chest. He advanced to meet Barnston, and held out his big right hand.

"I got canoes," he said. "I got blanket an' grub. Anyt'ing I can, I do very glad."

Barnston shook the big hand cordially, thinking as he did so that old Cronk was dead right about the obvious goodness of the Cherettes—of Remie, at any rate. He glanced past Remie's shoulder at the sons. Yes, they all looked kind and honest, and there was nothing in their appearance to suggest madness. He thanked Remie for his offer of assistance, and told of the accident, and of Tom Breen's condition, in a few words.

Remie looked at the old man.

"You know dis Tom Breen, what?" he asked.

"Sure I know the Breens," replied Peter. "They live down below the mouth of Oxbow."

Remie nodded.

"Now we fit you out good," he said to Barnston.

They all walked to the house, which was now more than twice its original size, the sportsman and Remie and Peter going in front, Adelard and Paul following, with their axes on their shoulders. They saw startled faces at the window; but at a wave of an arm from Remie, the door opened, and Mme. Cherette appeared on the threshold. Remie called to her in French, and she came forward, smiling.

Now Barnston knew that the old man had told the truth in saying that these good people lived in fear of a visit from some enemy; and instead of feeling scornful amusement at their fear, his heart was touched with pity. He doffed his cap to the woman in a manner that gave the lie to his apparel.

Richard Barnston had to refuse more food and blankets than he accepted. The best of the Cherettes' four canoes was placed at his disposal; and then the whole family tried to load it. He stood beside the canoe and pulled things out almost as fast as they were put in. Every one laughed. The sportsman was delighted, but embarrassed.

Neither his delight nor his embarrassment was entirely due to the superfluity of blankets and provisions. Evidently Jeanne Cherette had something to do with his state of mind and heart. Her eyes were really extraordinary. He had seen many eyes, had even gazed into many, but never had he seen a pair to equal Jeanne's. They were at once elfin and human, mysterious

and honest, shy and friendly; and her wonderful eyes were by no means the girl's only attraction.

While Richard worked at the canoe, doing more unloading than loading, he talked. He told of himself, frankly and unaffectedly, inspired by a lively desire to assure them that they had nothing to fear from him.

He told them that he came into the woods every year, but, to date, never twice to the same place; that he had lived in New York for five years, and made his living by drawing and painting pictures, mostly for the magazines; that he had lost a book full of new drawings in Two Devils Rapids; that he did not always make his trips into the woods in the shooting season, but just as often during the summer or in the depth of winter; that he had once spent three months in a lumber camp on the Tobique; that he had served four years in the war with a New Brunswick battalion, and that his parents lived in England with his only sister. He talked in English for the most part, but now and then tried to clear a point in labored French—not Quebec French, but a mixture of the language of the grammarians and the lingo of the Western front.

Peter Cronk, who had hovered about, listening in silence and contributing nothing to the emergency outfit, suddenly offered to accompany Richard down to where he had left Tom Breen. He said that there would be some carrying to be done, as the water was unusually low in the brook. It cost him a mighty effort of will to make the offer, for he dreaded the dark and lonely return up the twelve miles of Lame Squaw brook. A year ago, even six months ago, he would not have hesitated about walking the woods all night, had there been a sufficient reason for doing so; but he knew that now every shadow would look like a man or a wolf to him. However, he saw that it was his duty, in his new character, for the good of his soul, to go downstream with the sportsman; for an accident, and the consequent delay, might cost Tom Breen his life.

The sportsman accepted the offer gladly. Then he turned to Remie Cherette and asked the price of canoe, blankets, and provisions. Remie replied that the food and blankets were gifts, but that he must ask twenty dollars for the canoe, as he was not so well off as he had been once upon a

time. He was in no hurry for the money, he added—any time would do.

"The canoe is worth sixty dollars!" exclaimed Richard. "Those are expensive blankets, too. Well, just as you say—here's the twenty. You have put me under obligations, but I don't object to being under obligations to so generous a man. I accept your gifts with warmest thanks, and I hope that some day I may be able to do you a kindness in return."

Remie drew him a few paces away from the others, with a hand on his elbow, and spoke low and earnestly, gazing searchingly into his eyes.

"We 'ave trouble, dis family—but not of our own sin," said Remie. "We live in fear, an' we come 'ere to dis country to lay *perdu*. It is no disgrace of our own make, no murder, no t'iefing. You repay me very much by not tell de name, de word Cherette, to any man in de world."

Richard took the other's hand.

"I swear not to mention you to a living soul, on my word of honor," he said. "I know that you haven't done anything wrong, and I am sorry for your trouble. Perhaps you will tell me what it is, when you know me better; but be sure that I am your friend, Remie Cherette—and that old Cronk is your friend, too. As for the canoe—well, I think I'll bring it back, after taking Tom home."

Without waiting for an answer, he pushed the canoe off and stepped aboard. Peter Cronk was already in the bow, with his back to the shore, paddle in hand, anxious to escape from the cowardly impulse to recall his offer and flee into the woods. They shot out upon the still water of the lake. Then Richard turned and waved his cap, and shouted:

"*Au revoir!*"

"*Bon voyage!*" cried the men on shore, waving their hats, and the mother and daughter waved their hands.

Presently the old man turned and asked Richard what Remie Cherette had been whispering to him. Richard told him.

"That's right," returned Peter. "He didn't tell ye what the trouble was all about, but I've told ye. Keep it quiet. Not a word about new folks bein' settled here on Snowshoe! Don't say the name Cherette to a livin' soul—not even to Tom Breen. I wouldn't wonder if that Roger's nosin' around somewheres near already. What was that I heard ye say to Remie

about fetchin' back the canoe? It's a long way an' a hard one from the mouth of Ox-bow up an' in to here."

"I know it's long and hard, for I've been over it; but the canoe is worth three times twenty dollars, so what else can I do but return it? I've done a good year's work, and can afford the time; and I'm strong enough to afford a little extra sweat and elbow grease. I'm a pretty good canoe-man, with either pole or paddle, white water or black, up stream or down; and I can go ahead with my work wherever I am. Most of my drawings are of the back settlements and the woods, and they are my best. There's good material for pictures on Snowshoe Lake. I lost my outfit—that's true; but I can make notes and rough sketches on any sort of paper. There's no reason in the world why I shouldn't fetch Remie Cherette's canoe back to him."

The old man stared at the stranger so long that it is a wonder he did not get a crick in his neck.

"It's that girl, I bet a dollar!" he said at last.

"You're crazy!" exclaimed Richard; and then, smiling, he added: "But not nearly as crazy as I thought a few hours ago."

VI

ON Lame Squaw brook, Richard Barnston stood in the canoe and used the pole to steer her down the swift, shallow, boulder-strewn water.

His action with the long pole was just the reverse of that called for in ascending against the current. He threw his weight forward instead of backward. He went with the stream, yet he backed almost continuously against it, now on the right and now on the left, now holding for several seconds and again for a fraction of a second, now releasing the canoe and letting her slide, now shooting the pole forward and down again and bringing her to a quivering stop.

"Snubbing her down" is what it is called, and that term describes it. To have let the canoe run free with the stream for more than a few seconds at a time would have meant a spill and the wetting of the freight, at least—at most the breaking of the canoe's back, the loss of the outfit, and a delay of many hours in the relief of Tom Breen.

In life and in books miles and miles of snarling waters are "run" and miles of shouting rapids are "shot"; but this was no place for running or shooting. Here was only a swift brook containing too many flat and humped rocks and not enough water. So Richard worked like a hero, with nerve and skill and strength, yet without either the appearance or the sensation of heroism.

Old Peter Cronk crouched in the bow, with his paddle ready for a stab to right or left or straight ahead in case of desperate need. As menace after menace was avoided and passed, his attitude relaxed; and at last he drew his paddle inboard and lit his pipe.

Six miles down, at a point where there was not so much as a canoe length of straight water, they went ashore, unloaded, and carried around. Below that the stream was not quite so shallow, rock-chewed, and crooked as above it. Richard relaxed his snubs a little, loosened up, let the canoe go with the current for as much as forty yards at a time, and once or twice pushed her along.

When darkness fell they were in clear water. The night came frostily, with a big moon.

They found Tom Breen lying beside a fire of driftwood, sore and hungry, and in a bad temper. They fried bacon, made tea, and appeased his hunger. The old man went over Tom's arms and legs with probing, investigating fingers. Then he turned to Richard and asked:

"Did ye promise to pay him ten dollars a week till he's on his feet an' at work again?"

"Twenty dollars a week," replied the sportsman.

"Ye got more money nor brains. I've traveled fifteen mile, on webs, worse hurt nor him!"

"What the hell d'ye know about how bad I'm hurt?" cried Breen.

"I know by feelin'. You ain't the only Breen I've met!"

"Can you walk down to the canoe?" asked Richard.

"I couldn't put my weight on a foot if it was to save my life," replied Breen. "The pain's awful!"

"That log on the fire," said Richard, pointing. "It lay back there at the edge of the brush when I last saw it. Did it come to your whistle?"

So Tom walked to the canoe, making the worst of it, and took his place just forward of the middle bar with agonized groans. Richard pushed off, stepped in, and swung to the current, glancing back with a grin and a high twirl of the paddle. Then he sped away, and old Peter Cronk was left at the edge of the hurrying water, with thirteen miles of haunted loneliness and hinting shine and shade between himself and the nearest lamplight.

A sense of having been cheated out of the performance of a good deed occupied Peter's attention, to the exclusion of fear, for close upon two miles of his homeward journey. No merit had been acquired by helping to carry food and the means of transportation to a man who was pretending helplessness with the intention of cheating his employer. All this muscular labor and mental and spiritual distress had been for nothing. He was deeply disappointed and very angry.

A crash in the brush ahead diverted his attention from his anger and chagrin, and brought him to a palsied halt. Up came the old gun to his shoulder, trembling like a reed. A bounce of hoofs on sand and rock, a dark shape leaping and splashing, and a crash of breasted brush on the opposite bank, told him that it was only a deer in a hurry. He lowered the gun and resumed his journey, but his thoughts were no longer of Richard Barnston's dishonest guide.

He stepped with the extreme of caution, pausing frequently to tire his eyes against the gloom to right and left and the crouched shadows ahead, and to strain his ears for a sound of booted feet or of four padded paws. A jumping rabbit gave him a nasty start. A porcupine rustling in dead leaves put a momentary kink in his arterial circulation. The condition of his nerves grew worse and worse with the passage of every mile; and at last, when a high-stepping buck deer appeared from nowhere and stood squarely across his path, he up and let fly with both barrels at once.

The recoil of the double explosion was terrific; and at the roar of those extra charges, the buck went down in front of the old gun and Peter went down behind it. Peter got up a minute later, rubbing his right shoulder. He recovered the gun, went forward, and stumbled over the dead deer.

That was the last straw. Nipping his

feet under him, he ran. He ran all the way home.

The old man was early at the Churette house next day, and joined the hospitable family at breakfast. He told them that he had seen the young man from New York safely away with Tom Breen, and also told of Tom's little game. He described Richard Barnston's masterly descent of *Lame Squaw* in a highly complimentary manner.

Remie Churette remarked that the sportsman seemed to be a very fine young man, and every one agreed with him.

"He's fetchin' back the canoe," said Peter. "Talks of stoppin' here a spell an' drawin' pictures."

He shot a glance at Jeanne, and had the satisfaction of seeing the color deepen in her smooth cheeks.

"Funny t'ing!" said Remie. "Find a fat deer on de brook, dead as bacon, dis very mornin'. Maybe you shoot 'im, Peter, what?"

"Sure I shot him. He asked for it. Forgot all about it."

Remie nodded, dipped into a hip pocket and rolled two small and somewhat flattened lumps of dull metal on the table under the old man's startled stare.

"You shoot 'im wid dese 'ere," said Remie. "Silver bullet!"

All gazed at Peter, who was regarding the lumps of metal with the solemnity of desperation. He picked them up, seemed to weigh them in his hand, then tucked them away in a pocket and raised his gaze to the big Frenchman's face.

"Ye're right—silver bullets," he said. "I pulled on that buck suddent, both bar'ls to once. That's what the old gun be loaded with—silver bullets. Ye may's well hear it now as later. It be loaded for *loup-garou*. That's what I been watchin' out for all these months, with this old gun—*louns-garous*. That be the truth, Remie Churette. If ye don't like it ye kin lump it, for I be my own master, an' old enough to shoot a bullet into wolves an' devils whenever I see them, if I take the notion. That's me!"

"My friend, I know de trut'," returned Remie. "Paul, 'e tell me 'ow 'e tell you all dat when 'e see dese silver bullets. I know why you run de wood wid dat old gun, an' I t'ank you. I t'ank you from de 'eart, brave old man! Good friend! Dis family Churette, it 'ave no such good friend nowhere!"

Peter was embarrassed. Gazing down at the buttered pancake on his plate, he murmured:

"Time I was of some use to somebody but myself! I be kinder took with you folks, an' was from the first."

Remie left his seat, came around the table, pulled the old man upright, and embraced him. Then Mme. Cherette embraced him, and then Jeanne and Adelard and Paul did the same thing. Poor Peter sank to his stool again and crammed half the pancake into his mouth.

"A friend!" cried Remie, waving an arm. "De greates' t'ing in all de whole world—a friend!" Then, in a lower voice, he added: "But you don't shoot de 'uman man, my good friend—not quick, firs' look, bang, like dat—like you shoot de buck deer?"

Peter knew what was coming. Paul had told him of Remie's scruples.

"I'll look twice," he said.

"An' shoot more straight. No, my friend, it is not good. De poor *loup-garou*, 'e is 'uman, on two foot or on four paw. It is murder!"

"I don't agree with ye. A devil ain't human. Would ye have me set around with my hands folded an' leave a wolf chaw my windpipe out, like what happened to yer dog Victor? The dog was the humanest beast of the two, an' well ye know it! I ain't sayin' but what it may be different with yerself, suspicionin' how I'd feel if a beast like that had once been a brother of mine. It ain't natural to shoot what once was yer brother, no matter what he might 'a' turned into, but I reckon ye'd pull the trigger quick enough if ye see him ready to grind his p'inted teeth into yer womenfolk!"

"Dat is true! I shoot 'im—de wolf—when 'e jump! God 'elp me!"

"An' for myself, bein' neither kith nor kin to that trick of the devil, I shoot before he jumps."

With that, the old man rose from his seat at the table, took his gun from the corner, and stepped toward the door. He was overtaken and clasped to a standstill by Marie Cherette; and then Remie and the two women begged and scolded until, in desperation, he promised not to discharge a firearm at Roger Cherette in either form, or at any man or wolf that might possibly be that same Roger, unless in defense of his own or another's life.

While this promise was being prayed and pestered out of him, Adelard and Paul sat in silence, with downcast eyes. When he went out, they followed him, and expressed their disapproval of their parents' attitude.

"I'll save them, in spite of their foolishness," replied the old man. "I got to do it! If I ain't let do it with shootin', then I got to do it some other way. When Peter Cronk sees his duty—sees it clear, p'inted out by the finger of God Almighty—a few ounces of gunpowder one way or t'other ain't neither here nor there!"

VII

PETER CRONK went home, made a fire, and melted and remolded the silver bullets, which had flattened against the bones of the buck deer. He then reloaded the old gun, placed new caps on the nipples, and set it in a corner.

"If ever he comes inside here, at the first sign of hair on his neck or blood in his eye I'll sure hand him both bar'ls!" he told himself.

He then looked over the five axes on the premises. They were of various weights, lengths of handle, and degrees of keenness and rustiness. Three had belonged to the late Sam Kell, and their worn blades and sweat-stained handles spoke of the dead man's energy and of his hunger for cleared land.

Peter weighed and balanced all of them in his hands, one by one, and presently seemed to be satisfied with one that he selected. On this he put an edge with a broken whetstone, and then he filed the same for his belt-ax. After that, with the shorter and lighter tool in his belt and the other on his shoulder, he set out for the valley of the brook.

There, three miles from the Cherette house, he found a glade in the woods that looked like the right place to him. At the lower end of it stood a big maple. On the maple he blazed a mark as tall and broad as a man, and from this he retired for a distance of six paces. Then he turned, lowered the ax from his shoulder, swung it, and let fly. The wide back of the metal wedge struck fair, denting the tough wood, and fell to the ground.

Peter hurried forward and examined the dent. It was not deep enough to satisfy him. He threw again from the same distance, with greater force and equal accu-

racy. From a distance of ten paces he threw eight times before making what he considered an effective hit. From fifteen paces away he hurled and hurled until the ax felt more like fifty pounds than its true weight, and the moisture of his brow slid into his eyes. From twenty paces he made one wild fling, which missed the tree by a yard. He rested for half an hour after that.

The next day was full of rain, but after breakfast the old man went forth with his two axes. He had rubbed the muscles of his neck, arms, and shoulders with hot bear's grease before going to bed. He felt limber as whalebone and as loose as ashes. He scouted down the brook until noon, lunched on cold victuals and hot tea, smoked out a pipe, and then set about his new form of exercise again. Before he headed for home, he was denting a man-sized target at every throw from a distance of twenty paces.

Remie Cherette had sworn his sons to maintain a passive attitude toward their dreaded uncle should they ever meet him, except under the most desperate necessity for violence. Now, suspecting that Peter Cronk had not relinquished all hostile intentions in promising not to use any fire-arm against Roger, he made a point of keeping Adelard and Paul from associating with the old man, except in the family circle. He feared Peter's influence.

His sons were already dissatisfied with the attitude of nonresistance. They had asked why they should run away from the accursed one, why money should be given to him every time he found them out, and whether it would not be better and braver to defy him to do his worst, and so have it over with in one way or another. They had asked these questions many times; and these were not all.

Adelard was always wanting to be told why they had not moved to a city, and was never satisfied with the telling, refusing to believe that any harm could come to them in the midst of crowded houses, clanging pavements, and tinkling telephones, under the glare of electric lights and the guardianship of the police, from a creature so fundamentally of the wilderness, and so foreign to modern civilization, as a *loup-garou*. Remie had reminded him, again and again, of the fact that the first Cherette to suffer the curse had taken on the form of a wolf within the walls of Que-

bec, in the porch of a house; and yet the young man was not convinced.

Remie's position had been difficult and distressing ever since his brother's appalling confession; and of late years it had become equivocal, as well. He was a good man, conscientious and kind. His head was as honest as his heart. In the old days he had loved his brother Roger, and had looked up to him; and for years after the dreadful curse had come to Roger, the old affection had held. In those days Remie had felt a profound pity and anxiety for his brother, and had fled from him only for the safety of his wife and children.

At the last meeting, however, he had been shocked by the realization that brotherly love was dead, and that the big man with the fierce and crafty eyes and cruel mouth now touched his heart only with disgust and fear. Since then all his anxiety had been for his wife and children; and because of this his conscience was uneasy. Only his honesty, his sense of right, enabled him to maintain the attitude which was slowly but surely impoverishing him, and which had already made fugitives of him and his.

He had pleaded with Peter Cronk to refrain from pulling a trigger on any man or any beast that might possibly be the accursed Roger, and he had gained his point; but in his secret heart he knew that he would feel nothing but relief, indescribable relief, should he hear of Roger's death. Sometimes he regretted his interference with the old man; for, except by flight and concealment, or through the death of Roger by some other hand than a kinsman's, he saw no way of escape. Had the sin of murder—of the murder of his brother—been the only price to pay for deliverance, perhaps he would have hardened his heart and done the deed at the last encounter; but that was not all. There would be a still more terrible price to pay.

VIII

THERE was rain for days, off and on, in the Snowshoe country; and then, after a slashing night of it, the frost struck, sudden and hard. The wide, dark boughs of spruce and fir and hemlock hung low with their weights of ice, and every gray and brown twig of the hardwoods and the poplars was incased in crystal. Ice skimmed the lake and the edges of swift streams. The whole wilderness was caught in a film;

and when the sun topped the eastern horizon the whole world of Snowshoe and Lame Squaw flashed with millions of icy fires. It was a vision of marvelous, unbelievable beauty.

Old Peter Cronk opened his door and looked, and blinked and shivered and looked again. Then he shut the door with a bang, and stepped back and stuffed more wood into his little stove.

"Ice!" he exclaimed. "To hell with it! I bet a dollar it 'll sicken that young feller ag'in' makin' the back trip. He'll see the ice an' feel a lick of the frost, an' he'll head for New York!"

Peter fried ham and boiled tea, emptied frying pan and teakettle to the last fragment and drop, and then filled and lit his pipe—all in a low and peevish humor.

"He be the one an' only sport what's come in on Snowshoe since that October when poor Sam had the toothache so bad, an' I pulled out one of the only three ivories he had left with a bit of rabbit wire. It was a caution, the way he hollered. If Richard Barnston was here now, I'd set in by the stove an' leave him to traipse round through the woods an' keep an eye skinned for *louns-garous*. That be an able young man. Me an' him could 'a' kep' guard day an' night. I be gittin' a mite too thin-blooded for traipsin' abroad in reel frosty weather."

The little stove whispered seductively and radiated delicious warmth. The kettle upon it purred soothingly and spirited a feather of steam. Outside, against and beyond the frost-engraved window, bitter cold crept desolately around the cabin and around the world.

Again the old man went reluctantly to the door, and again he opened it and looked out. Phew! Wow! His breath was frozen and then snatched away. He shut the door and returned to the stove.

"I never before see the like of it this side December," he soliloquized. "Jump-in' desperation! I wouldn't turn a b'ar out sich weather!"

He sat down on a block in front of the stove, and refilled his pipe. He blinked his keen old eyes at the pulsing red cracks in the hot iron. He looked over a shoulder and blinked at the frosty window. Then his uneasy conscience began to fret him, and fear for his soul began to pluck at his heart. He sighed profoundly, and laid his pipe on the hearth of the stove.

"The devil!" he exclaimed, and reached for his extra socks, which he drew on over the two thicknesses of wool with which his feet were already incased. "The Lord's sure ridin' me, an' no mistake!" He reached for his high boots of cowhide and pulled them on. "When I was workin' for myself, I stopped indoors days like this—but the Almighty's a hard boss!" He stood up, sighing, and donned a vest of Indian-tanned moose skin. Over this he drew a knee-length garment which he had fashioned from a new horse blanket with his own hands, five years before. "Maybe, if I'd signed on with Him fifty year ago, I'd be takin' it easier now."

He wound a red muffler about his neck, pulled a cap of thick cloth down over his brow and ears, and stuffed his pockets with bread and molasses cookies of Mme. Cherette's baking. The generous woman had kept him in breadstuff, plain and fancy, ever since her arrival on Snowshoe. To these he added slices of cold fried salt pork of his own curing and cooking.

Next he emptied the kettle, and stowed it, a tin mug, and a can of tea into an oat sack. Then, with the short ax at his side and the big ax and the sack on his shoulder, he went forth into the breath-snatching cold.

The sun was bright—and that is all that could be said in its favor. It made all the trees and moss and stumps and wood piles, and even the chips in the dooryard, flash like diamonds and rubies and opals; but there was not so much as a hint of warmth in all that flash and glitter.

Peter kept out of the range of the Cherettes' windows on his way to the woods, fearing that those hospitable souls would drag him inside, if they saw him, and force more hot food and hot drink upon him. He had a shrewd suspicion that if such a thing should happen neither his power of will nor the prickings of his conscience would prove strong enough to drive him out again before noon. The Cherette kitchen was the easiest place in the world in which to sit and forget one's troubles and unpleasant duties; and so, for his soul's sake, the old man kept a screen of young firs between himself and those windows, until the clearings were crossed.

He found the ice thick, and steadily thickening, along the edges of Lame Squaw. Twelve hours more of this would freeze the swift stream clear across, leaving white-

breathed air holes here and there above the fiercest snarls of water. He went down to the place where he had first practiced ax throwing, and there removed his horse blanket coat and warmed up with half an hour's exercise.

He was resting after this, and looking out through the icy brushwood at the fast freezing stream, when a thing came into his field of vision which caused his heart to jump and stand still. It was a wolf!

The beast was picking its way over the icy boulders on the far side of the stream. It was as high and long as a collie dog, and heavier. Peter was not familiar with wolves, having seen only one before this, and the tracks of another, in the whole course of his woodland life; but his heart knew this for a wolf as surely as did his eyes. It was a wolf—and a wolf of unusual size, at that. Its manner of moving over and among the icy boulders, pausing after every cautious step to glance to right and left; was also unusual. There was a suggestion of the human in its manner—or so, at least, it seemed to Peter.

His heart recovered, and resumed its normal activity. He set his feet firmly, drew a deep breath, swung his ax, and let it fly. It circled and flashed in the cold sunshine. The wolf saw the flash of it and cringed aside; and as the wedge of steel struck, sending splinters of ice and rock spraying from a big boulder, the great beast slipped into the black bushes and was gone like a shadow.

For a full minute the old man stood motionless, staring across the freezing stream. Chagrin, his first reaction to his failure, was driven out by a numbness of despair. Not for a moment did he doubt the identity of that wolf. The *loup-garou* had passed him, and the way lay open before it to the objects of its inexorable pursuit. He, Peter Cronk, had failed!

He crossed the stream, breaking the ice, wading knee-deep in the icy water, staggering like a drunkard against the thrust of the stream. He picked up his ax and set out at a shuffling trot for the clearings on the lake.

He was breathless, weary of limb, tortured by a stabbing pain in his side, stooped and staggering, when he reached the edge of the woods and looked out across the big clearance at the Cherette house and farmstead. He straightened himself, with a gasping sigh of relief, at what he saw.

There was a plume of blue atop the gray chimney. There were Adelard and Paul operating a crosscut saw on a great stick of maple, and Remie clawing away at one of the old haystacks with a stable fork. There was no sign of the wolf, or of a fourth man. It was a scene of tranquillity.

Peter sat down on an ice-capped stump, rested his ax against his knee, and nursed the stitch out of his side. That done, he approached the busy and peaceful farmstead composedly, with one ax on his shoulder, another at his belt, and his pipe in his mouth.

"Cold day," he said. "Worst I ever see before December."

Adelard and Paul agreed with him, and asked him where he had been. He gestured quickly in the general direction of *Lame Squaw*. At that moment the three were joined by Remie, who asked Peter why he had not come in for breakfast, to try the new sausages.

"I'll try 'em to-morrow," replied Peter.

"You was choppin' to-day?" queried Remie.

Peter shook his head.

"You carry plenty ax."

"Maybe so. A man's got to carry somethin' for to protect himself with; an' the nex' thing to a gun's an ax, to my way of thinkin'."

There was a note of defiance in the old man's voice, and he gazed steadily at Remie as he spoke. Remie's glance wavered, and he rubbed his bearded chin reflectively with a mittened hand.

"Dat is so," he said slowly.

Peter entered the kitchen, shed his weapons, his cap, and his horse blanket coat, and watched Mme. Cherette and Jeanne bake and fry and stew for the mid-day meal. It was almost the pleasantest way known to him of spending half an hour of a cold day—quite the pleasantest being the consumption of the results of all that baking and frying and stewing; but to-day his attention was distracted. He could not keep his mind on the attractive sights and odors of the cooking. When a plank of the door snapped with frost, he turned quick as a flash and shot out a hand toward the corner in which he had set the larger of his two axes.

"What is de matter, Peter?" asked Jeanne apprehensively.

"This here blisterin' cold weather always gives me the jumps," he lied. "Been

that way since I was knee-high to nothin'. The snap of a frosty tree out in the woods makes me jump like a rabbit."

It was quite evident to him that the girl did not believe him; and he felt ashamed of himself for being such a poor liar. He tried to put the wolf out of his mind. He told himself that when it appeared would be time enough to think about it, now that it had found its way into the Snowshoe country.

Nevertheless, when the frost snapped the door again, he started just as violently as before; and when the door opened he jumped clear of his seat—but it was only Paul looking in to ask how soon dinner would be ready. He called himself an old fool, and settled down determinedly to take his fill of sniffing and gazing—but what was the use? He went to the window and peeped out through a little hole in the frost.

It was then that the girl came to his elbow.

"What do you look for to come into de house?" she whispered. "You 'ave fear of somet'ing to-day. What did you see in de woods?"

"In the woods? I see one porkypine an' two partridge."

"You don't tell de lie very good, Peter!"

"Who, me? Me tell a lie?"

He turned and walked back to his seat near the stove. The girl turned to her mother, who had been watching and listening furtively and fearfully.

"You see!" she said. "He make believe; but he got a scare in de woods to-day. He look for somet'ing to open de door."

"Got a scare!" cried the old man angrily. "What of it? What if I did git a scare? It ain't for myself I be scairt—ye can bet a dollar on that! Can't a man feel a mite narvous an' edged up without havin' his everlastin' life pestered out of him? What I seen was a b'ar, if ye have to know, an' it give me a turn, I must admit; but I ain't lookin' for it to come into this kitchen, nor no foolishness like that."

"So? What you mean to say you not scared for yourself?"

The old man was so keenly exasperated by this questioning and doubting that he was on the point of telling the truth, even at the risk of terrifying both of them into hysterics, when the opening of the door again startled him to his feet. In came Remie and the boys, pulling off their mittens and caps and breathing on their hands,

all ready for the venison cutlets and bacon, the hot biscuits and apple sauce, the tea and doughnuts.

Even while eating, Peter was preoccupied. He showed his appreciation of the excellent fare by downing two helpings of everything, but at the same time he managed to keep one eye on the door, the other on the window, and both ears cocked for sounds from outside. It is not to be wondered at that he was deaf to Remie's repeated inquiries concerning the state of his health. He bolted his second mug of tea, then hurriedly prepared himself for the outer cold, belted on one ax and shouldered the other, and let himself out of the house, all without a word or glance in reply to Remie's hospitable protests.

Remie had presented a brave and care-free front to his guest and family throughout the dinner; but with the guest gone, his anxiety got the upper hand of his fortitude. He waved his great arms and cried, in his mother tongue:

"Some terrible t'ing has happened! The old man has seen or heard some terrible t'ing! And he will not tell. He is full of anxiety, yet he does not tell. He spares our feelings. He is a brave old man, but simple as a babe. Terror shines in his eyes. What has he seen? What has he heard? It must have been in de woods—down on de brook—dis very morning! Did he see my brother, or dat which was once my brother? If so, in what form? And what has happened? If Roger has hunted us down again—what? I have not enough money left to satisfy him. I refuse, and then—good God, what next?"

His wife and daughter soothed him. Perhaps the old man had not seen or heard Roger, after all. Perhaps Peter had told the truth when he said he had seen a bear; or, still more likely, the old man was losing his wits. He had been queer when they first met him, talking about the wriggling in his brain and holding his head with both hands. He seemed to have recovered from that, it was true, but what more probable than that he had developed another form of madness?

Thus the women talked; but Adelard and young Paul kept to their seats and made no effort to dispel their father's fears. On the contrary, Paul said that Peter Cronk was quite as sane as any other person on Snowshoe Lake, and Adelard muttered his agreement.

Remie, still excited, freed himself from the women and faced his sons.

"I believe as you do, my boys," he cried; "and I do not blame you for feeling as you do about my weakness, which has brought us to dis condition—hiding like criminals, and poor; but he was once my brother. Whatever is still human in him is blood kin to me and to you. Some day he will try to kill one of us—one of his own blood—for so it has always been. Then, with God's help, we shall be rid of him forever; but to kill in cold blood, even if we have de power—to kill de son of my father and my mother—it would be murder dat would damn our souls to everlasting torment. You do not think so? You do not believe it would be murder to slay a *loup-garou*, even of your own blood? Then know dis, which I have kept from you all dese years—de curse passes to de slayer and his children. We are not descended from Noel Cherette, but from his brother Pierre, de man who killed him; and de curse is not in Noel's family, but only in Pierre's."

"But, dear God, Pierre killed to save his life from de wolf!" exclaimed Adelard, his voice shaken with horrified protest. "To save his life—in de last extremity—from dat devil!"

"Dat is true. Now you understand why I have paid and run away."

"But why, in God's name, did you stop de old man? Dere is no other way! What other hope have we—what other chance of escape?"

"I was weak. I have been a fool. At night I dream of him—not of de evil man whom you know, but of my big brother, who was kind to me when I was little; and de dreams haunt my days. I fear de man. I hate de beast dat looks out of his eyes, but I love de boy—my big brother—who was kind to me long ago!"

IX

PAUL CHERETTE slipped out of that tragic family circle and ran all the way to Peter's cabin at top speed. He arrived there, breathing hard, only to find the chimney cold and the door hooked on the outside.

After a moment's hesitation, he unfastened the door and entered. The place was cold as a barn, and smelled of the ghosts of many fried repasts and many smoked out pipes. Paul soon found what he was looking for—the double-barreled duck gun.

Copper caps were on the nipples, and a simple investigation with the ramrod told him that both barrels were loaded; but whether they were charged with the silver bullets he did not know. It might be that unblest silver bullets would be no more deadly against a *loup-garou* than ordinary bullets of lead; but he felt quite sure that any kind of bullet would be better than none.

The boy shouldered the weighty weapon, fastened the door behind him, and headed for the woods. He found Peter Cronk seated on a stump at the back of the largest clearance, looking out intently at the Cherette farmstead through a thin screen of brushwood. At the sound of Paul's approach the old man leaped up and around, with his ax swung back. Upon seeing the lad, he lowered the ax and frowned.

"What's brung ye out?" he asked. "What call have ye to come traipsin' through the woods? In the house is where ye'd ought to be, an' with the door shut an' barred, at that! An' what the devil be ye doin' with my gun?"

Paul handed him the gun, and then told him the appalling secret recently divulged by Remie. The old man did not get it clear at the first telling, and the boy repeated it in more careful phraseology.

"An' he talked me out of shootin'!" exclaimed Peter. "He's crazy—that's one sure thing!"

"Not in de brain," returned the lad. "It's in de 'eart. Too good! Too soft! But you scare 'im so bad to-day I guess he don't feel de same way now."

"Jumpin' canthooks! If I'd had the gun in my hands this mornin' down on the brook, I'd 'a' blowed a hole in the beast—two holes!"

"What did you see? Was it Roger 'imself?"

"Not on his two feet, anyhow. It was a wolf—the biggest I ever sot eyes on. He was headin' up this way. I throwed from t'other side the stream. He seen it comin', an' dodged; but he couldn't 'a' got out of the way of two bullets!"

"Did you see it after?"

"No, but I'm lookin'; an' nex' glimpse I git, we'll know if these bullets be any good without the priest's blessin'. I melted them down an' molded them agin as good as ever."

"Was it Roger?"

"Boy, I'll tell ye—keep an eye on the

clearance! I've lived here on Snowshoe more years than the devil has rings on his horns, an' once only before this very day—an' that was when I first come—did I ever see a wolf in this country. Once only, mind ye, an' their tracks in the snow may be twice. The animal I see to-day was goin' slow an' careful over the icy rocks, an' stoppin' every few steps, like he was studyin' hard on what he was doin', more like a man nor a beast."

"It's Roger! I know it's Roger! A real wolf wouldn't travel like you say. I've seen plenty real wolves."

"I reckon ye're right, lad; but don't go an' git discouraged. I be the man to fix him, if anything human kin do it. Quick an' straight—that's how I shoot; an' I kinder suspicion this here old gun could blow a hole through Old Nick himself, blessin' or no blessin'!"

Paul was comforted by Peter's confident tone and words, and by his manner of holding the big gun ready in both hands and turning his keen glance continually in every direction. Urged by the old man, who knew that he would soon be missed by the afflicted family, Paul went home by the shortest path, which was across the open fields and in the old man's view all the way.

Cold as it was, Peter stood to his duty until sundown; but he saw nothing more formidable than a red fox. He supped in his own house, feeling a delicate embarrassment toward the Cherettes in their sad plight, now that the hideous peril was so near that they could no longer hide their terror. Remie had always kept a brave face before Peter, and the old man felt that it would be an unfriendly intrusion to look upon his fear now. He had heard enough from Paul to convince him that the whole family was in a state of blue funk, partly by reason of his own behavior before and during dinner, but more by reason of Remie's disclosure of the truth concerning the transmission of the curse. The fact that Remie had made that tragic disclosure was proof that he had lost his grip on himself; so Peter cooked his own supper and ate alone.

Before slicing his pork he had lighted the lantern and the stove at the same time, and had blanketed the window. He sat close to the stove and faced the door. His axes lay beside him, and the old gun stood within easy reach of his right hand. He

paused often in his chewing and sipping to listen for sounds of clawed paws or booted feet on the icy ground.

He had finished the last slice of fried pork from the pan and the last drain of bitter brew from the kettle, and was smoking his pipe, when he heard a sound that jerked every nerve and stiffened every muscle in his body, that chilled his blood and ran fingers of ice up and down his spine. It was the clanging, desolated howl of a lonely wolf to the frosty stars.

"God help us now!" he whispered, and reached for the gun.

His imagination made him a picture of the family in the other house sitting horror-stricken and blanched and speechless at the sound.

It rang out again, and this time Peter thought that it sounded mournful rather than menacing. He got stiffly to his feet, gun in hand. He felt as if he was lifting many times the weight of the gun with his hands and a sack of meal with his shoulders. He moved slowly toward the door; and by the time he was halfway he felt as tired as if he had just carried a canoe around two hundred yards of white water.

He halted there and listened for a long time, hearing nothing but the creeping of the frost over the roof and the creeping of the heat over the glowing stove. He moved again—one step, this time—then halted and all but collapsed at a new sound—a sound of scratching claws on the door.

Peter sank to one knee and steadied himself with one hand on the floor. The scratching was repeated. Then came a sound of sniffing along the frosty crack between the sill and the bottom of the door. More scratching followed, and then a low, pitiful, beseeching, whimpering whine. He breathed at that.

"Maybe it's a dog," he told himself.

The scratching and sniffing and piteous whining were kept up for ten minutes before the old man moved again. Then he set his gun against the wall and went back and took up the shorter and lighter of his two selected axes. With the ax in his right hand, he returned to the door and cried, in a shaking voice:

"What d'ye want?"

At that the scratching was renewed with increased vigor, and the whining with a note of hope and joy.

"It don't sound devilish to me," reflected the old man. "It sounds like a good

dog that's got lost. I'll resk it, anyhow. If it ain't, I'll bash it once, an' jump back an' grab the gun."

With his left hand he drew back the wooden bar and raised the frosty latch. He felt a moving weight pressing against the door.

"Lay down!" he cried. "Keep still, can't ye?"

The pressure was instantly removed. He opened the door slowly, inch by inch, and was just about to peep around the edge of it when it was thrust wide with a force and suddenness that knocked him back against the wall. The edge of the door struck him on the nose and the right wrist, blinding him for a moment, and numbing his hand so that the ax fell to the floor.

Dazed, he slammed the door shut and stooped and fumbled for the ax. A large, hairy body leaped against him, and a long, wet tongue slashed his face. He staggered back. Again the animal flung itself against him, and again it licked his face.

Peter brushed the tears from his eyes and beheld the intruder jumping around and around, as if in an ecstasy of joy; but it was not a dog. There was light enough from the lantern on the table to show him that it was not a dog. It was a wolf.

He was about to stoop again and make another grab for the ax, when the beast leaped upon him for the third time, and again caressed him from whiskery chin to tearful eye with a scarlet tongue. It stood on its hind legs, with its forepaws on his shoulders, and gave him an awesome view of its long white fangs and black and red mouth and throat. Then it dropped to all fours again, frisked around a few times, and trotted over to the little table. There, after a few eager sniffs, it reared up again and licked all the grease out of the frying pan.

The old man advanced toward the beast, unarmed, without so much as a glance at gun or ax. He had seen more than the wolf's fangs and throat. He had seen a leather collar half hidden by the long hair of its neck. That was enough for him. He was neither fool enough nor frightened enough to believe for a moment that a *loup-garou* would under any circumstances permit itself to be collared.

"Hey there!" he cried. "Where's yer manners?"

The extraordinary creature turned from the pan, sprang joyously upon him, and

gave him a bacon-flavored lick. He seized it by the collar and shook it. He dealt it a playful cuff on a pointed ear. Ten minutes later, wolf and old man were seated side by side on a lynx skin on the floor. The old man shaved slices from a lump of frozen deer meat and fed them, one by one, to the wolf, who gulped them down as quick as lightning, and quivered with ecstatic expectancy between gulps. The old man talked the while.

"Ye'd best chaw it, or ye'll do yer stomach a hurt. Don't, if ye don't want to, but ye got teeth enough! Who tamed ye, an' what's yer name? I'll name ye Toby, for that be the name of a little dog I owned when I was a little boy. I knowed ye warn't a *loup-garou* the minute I got a good look into yer eyes; but it's lucky ye jumped quick this mornin' when I hove that ax. If ye be Roger Chereotype, or any other manner of devil, then I be a Frenchman! I reckon I'd know a *loup-garou* when I saw one. I'd ought to, anyhow, the way I've studied 'em over. Ye've wore this collar a long time, I kin see that; an' it's been let out six holes, one at a time. Ye was caught young—that's a sure thing. Ye're my dog now, Toby—or my wolf; an' I wouldn't wonder but ye'll help me hunt this here Chereotype *loup-garou*."

The old man seemed to find comfort in the sound of his own voice.

"I'd like to know what brung ye to Snowshoe," he went on, after a brief pause. "Ye be only the second wolf I ever see in these woods, an' t'other was a wild one, at that. Now I wouldn't wonder but ye was sent. Queer things has happened to me of late. I've lived in the woods too long for to put everything that happens down to nature. There's been more'n nature workin' hereabouts since them Chereettes come on the lake. I wouldn't wonder but God Almighty sent ye to me, like He cured the queer place in my brain an' p'inted out to me the errors of my life. If God knows when a bird falls off'n a twig—an' that be what my ma read to me one time back home, out of the Good Book—He'd sure know when an old man needs help back here on Snowshoe. If ye was a *loup-garou*, ye'd throw a fit at the name of God—but there ye set a gulpin' yer supper like a Christian. It ain't like I was sweatin' an' watchin' an' runnin' the woods entirely for myself. My first idee be to save my friends from the pickle their folks an' the devil got

'em into hundreds of years back; so it would be only right for Him to see the fix I be in an' lend a hand, an' I wouldn't wonder but He's done it. If ye've et an ounce, ye've et two pound! That 'll do ye till breakfast!"

Peter stuffed a large chunk of knotty yellow birch into the stove, set the gun beside his bunk, spread a blanket on the floor for the wolf, extinguished the lantern, and turned in. He fell asleep in a minute, and slept deep and dreamlessly for several hours. Then he came wide awake all of a sudden.

For a little while he lay motionless, staring wide-eyed against the utter darkness and straining his ears against the silence, wondering fearfully what had awakened him. He could see nothing, and he heard nothing but the creep and snap of frost in roof and wall and the creeping heat and snapping embers in the stove.

Then the extraordinary incidents of the early night flashed in his brain. The wolf! What had he done? He had taken in a wolf, and fed it, and given it a place to sleep within a yard of his bunk!

Slowly he raised his head, and then his shoulders, until he had an elbow under him. Now he could hear nothing but the thumping of his heart. He craned his neck and saw the wavering glow from the cracks in the top of the stove. Was the wolf there? And was it a wolf? What was there in the dark?

He sat up, lifting a weight of terror on his old shoulders, and pushed his blankets aside. Then he remembered throw, an' reached forward and around fokes. Gun in hand, he sat in his bunk and waited fearfully. He waited and waited an' finally fell asleep.

Again the old man awoke, but this time slowly, and in no doubt of the cause of the awaking. He was as cold as an icicle, for his blankets were all hanging over the edge of the bunk. The heavy gun lay across his aching thighs. A corner of the blanket at the window had fallen, and a ray of sunshine pierced the frosted glass and lit the cabin; and by that light he saw the great wolf lying coiled on its blanket, with its brush over its snout. Then he remembered the events of midnight, and the earlier night. He laid the gun in the back of the bunk and climbed out, stiffly but hurriedly.

"I misdoubted him!" he exclaimed. "I must 'a' been crazy!"

The wolf uncoiled and came to life in a flash, sent the old man staggering with an affectionate fling and lick, frisked merrily around the room three times, and then halted expectantly at the door. After a moment's hesitation, Peter opened the door long enough to permit the friendly beast to dart out.

"If he comes back, I'll sure know he was sent to me," he murmured. "If he don't, I'll sure be disappointed—an' sore as hell!"

The stove had no more than begun to throw a glow before a scratching of claws on the door set Peter's queer old heart jumping with relief and joy.

X

THIS day was as cold as the day before. Still worse, a wind was blowing from the northwest, driving the cold through wool and fur and rattling the ice-clad woods like twenty million skeletons. Not only did the wind rattle and clash the trees, but it tore and split thousands of them, for they were already weakened and strained by their dragging burdens of ice. Every now and again came appalling sounds of rending and crashing from the laboring forest.

Peter Cronk breakfasted with Toby seated close against the short section of log that served him for a chair. He shared the meal with his companion, dropping a piece of bread or fried meat into the ready maw at his elbow after every contribution to his own teeth. The frying pan was filled and emptied twice.

Immediately after breakfast they set out for the Churette house. Peter walked with the duck gun on his shoulder and the great wolf beside him. He saw Remie and Adalard slip from the woodpile into the house. When within forty yards of the door, he halted, waved an arm, and uttered a cheerful shout. Remie reappeared, closed the door behind him, and stood just clear of the threshold with a big ax balanced in his hands. He cried out to Peter, but in French, and with the words so desperately shaken and run together that he simply wasted his breath.

The old man and the wolf advanced again, side by side.

"This ain't what ye been expectin'," cried Peter. "This here be a reel wolf, but tame as a dog. Me an' him was together all night, an' didn't so much as growl at each other."

"Stop! Stan' still! Come no nearer!" yelled Remie.

Peter and the wolf obeyed.

"But he ain't yer brother, I tell ye!" the old man shouted back. "He got a collar around his neck. There be no more devil in Toby nor in yerself. Didn't I tell ye he slep' on the floor by my bunk all night, peaceful as a tame pig? Mind that there ax, Remie Cherette! This ain't yer brother, I tell ye! He be a reel wolf, this Toby—a decent wild beast, only tame, without a drop of humanity or devilment in his blood. If ye swing that ax, Remie Cherette—well, I got a gun right here in my two hands!"

At that moment the door opened behind Remie, and Adelard and Paul appeared. Adelard gazed at the wolf for a moment, glanced keenly at Peter, and then stepped forward, followed by Paul. He drew a doughnut from his pocket and tossed it into the air. The wolf jumped and caught it. A snap, a gulp, and Toby was ready for more. A second doughnut was tossed, snapped, and swallowed.

Adelard and Paul turned and looked significantly at their father, who uttered a glad cry, drove his ax into a log of the wall, and came forward empty-handed. The three Cherettes approached the wolf with signs and sounds of friendship, at which the wolf sat on his haunches close against the old man's leg and eyed them attentively but noncommittally.

"What's the grand idee?" asked Peter.

"We know now it is a real wolf, for Uncle Roger never could abide a doughnut—an' we are very glad," answered the lad Paul.

"Is it 'im you seen on the stream?" asked Remie.

"The identical same wolf," replied the old man. "I know him by his size an' color. Thank God I didn't hit him when I hove the ax acrost the brook at him! It was a reasonable mistake to make, considerin' what I was out lookin' for, but it sure would 'a' been a cryin' shame to bust the lights out of Toby. More'n the pity of it, I'd 'a' cal'lated I'd sure killed the *loup-garou*, an' that you folks was safe, so I'd 'a' quit watchin' out for the reel trouble. It was sure a lucky miss; an' I wouldn't wonder but the hand of God Almighty was into it."

"Ah, yes—I 'ope dat is true," said Remie reverently.

For a day the Cherettes forgot that this was but a postponement of trouble. Relief from immediate peril intoxicated them like strong wine. For more than half a day and throughout a sleepless and heart-breaking night had they listened for the footsteps of the dreaded visitor and the damning knock on the door; and now the menace was no nearer than it had been a week ago—nearer by only a week, anyway. Perhaps it was two or three years off, and almost anything might easily happen in two or three years. Roger might die in that time, for *loup-garous* are mortal, despite their devilish natures and supernatural characteristics. He might be dead even now, for that matter.

They were joyous for a day. They were fairly hysterical with joy, so great was their relief. Jeanne and her mother laughed, cried, laughed again, and embraced Peter Cronk. Remie embraced Peter; and if the old man had not lost his temper, Adelard and Paul would have embraced him, too. Remie made a brew of rum and sugar and a dash of hot water, while Jeanne fed cookies and cold sausages to the wolf. After a second brewing Remie produced a fiddle, and the others fell to dancing, with the exception of Peter and the wolf.

Peter and Toby sat in a corner, close together, and looked on at the frivolity of the Cherettes. Toby sat with his under jaw dropped, his scarlet tongue hanging out, his short ears pricked forward, and a light of amused interest in his yellow eyes. Peter's bewhiskered jaws were shut tight and his keen old eyes were clouded with disapproval. He had drunk his share of the toddies, so he felt perfectly in humor with the frivolity of his friends from his feet up to his neck; but the glow reached no higher, and reason sat cool and critical in his skull.

"That be the French of it for ye!" he reflected. "Jist because they ain't goin' to be tore to pieces to-day, nor marked with the curse this very mornin', they got to start dancin' an' cavortin' an' fiddlin' like a passel of gin-jingled Injuns!"

He resumed his coat of horse blanket, his woolen cap, and his mittens. The mittens, which were of the late Sam Kell's knitting, were worthy of special note and remark. The one for the right hand was a cross between a mitten and a glove, having a division for the index finger as well as for the thumb. A man may sometimes

want to shoot, or may have to shoot, when the weather is too cold for the laying of a bare finger across a trigger without painful consequences, or when there is no time to shake off a mitten.

The fiddling and the dancing ceased, and the whole family told Peter that he could not possibly go away until after dinner.

"I'll carry it along with me, an' a couple of bones for Toby," returned the old man in austere tones.

He had his way, and presently he set out for *Lame Squaw* with the heavy gun on his shoulder and the wolf at his heels. He had not reached the edge of the woods before he heard a shout behind him; and there was the lad Paul running after him. The three remained out until after dark.

The wolf left his human companions only once, and was back in twenty minutes. He showed no interest beyond a casual sniff or two at whatever scents the frozen underbrush contained. On the way home he ranged ahead and out to right and left, but always returned to the old man's whistle. When Peter and the boy reached the *Cherette* dooryard, the wolf was again out of sight; and Peter whistled three times before he reappeared from the direction of the stables. The old man refused to stop for supper, or even to enter the kitchen for long enough to warm his nose, fearing that the hospitality and frivolity of the *Cherettes* would have a weakening effect on his sense of duty.

The wind shifted during the night. Morning discovered woods and clearings and filmed waters white with snow, and the mild air still full of falling flakes. Peter and Toby sallied forth immediately after breakfast. The old man went in freshly greased boots, and with the leg of an old sock pulled over the breach and hammers of the old gun. He struck straight for the nearest point of the brook, giving the house of his emotional friends a wide berth. Fond as he was of the *Cherettes*, he was determined to keep clear of them until they had recovered their usual pose. They had exhausted his patience yesterday with their childish capers. They had cut up as if they had not a care in the world, when they should have been reflecting on their sins, and the sins of their ancestors, and the wrath of God, and watching out for trouble.

What had all their dancing and fiddling and embracing been about, anyway, when

you came to think it over? If they thought that their accursed kinsman had lost track of them, and that the curse was lifted, just because one wolf happened to turn out to be a real wolf, then they were fools. Yes, the old man was thoroughly out of patience, for the moment, with his emotional friends.

"It be lucky for them they come an' settled alongside of me," he said. "Aye, an' even that warn't accordin' to their own plans, the way I figger it. The thought of *Lame Squaw* an' *Snowshoe* was put into their minds—leastways, that be my idee of it. It was God's doin'!"

He halted, brushed the clinging snow from his beard, and thought hard.

"What I'd sure like to know be this—be the Almighty all het up over them *Cherettes* an' their salvation, or over me an' my salvation?"

He paused again, puckering his brow.

"It might make a difference, an' then agin I reckon it wouldn't—not with a fair an' square party like Him. It wouldn't even with some men. My first idee, jist after the fever an' visions, was how the *Cherettes* was sent in for my own salvation. I ain't so sure about it now, but I reckon He wouldn't overlook it if I was to do my duty by them, like I've been doin' right along since first I heard the nature of their trouble. However that might be, I'll save them folks from that there damned Roger if an old man with a sharp eye an' a quick finger can do it; an' if the recordin' angel don't notice it an' write it down, it'll sure be my misfortune, but it won't be my fault!"

Until noon the wolf kept close to the old man, but then it trotted off and did not return. When it had been gone nearly half an hour, Peter's anxiety became acute. He had whistled until his lips were too dry and sore to produce even one more blast. Forgetting the hour, and the food in his pockets, he set out on Toby's tracks, which curved off to the right through the icy brushwood. The tracks were easily followed where the growth sheltered them. They looped back and soon rejoined the path.

"I knowed he wouldn't go an' run away from me!" exclaimed Peter. "Somethin's called him home. Maybe he don't fancy the snow in his coat, or maybe he's studied out how the clearances need guardin'. Maybe, agin, he don't feel jist right, with

all the doughnuts an' fancy grub he et last night. I'll find him clawin' at the door, I bet a dollar!"

So the old man headed for home, by the way he had come, at a round clip.

The Cherettes, and particularly the head of the family, had waked that morning to an emotional reaction. The change in their mood was as extreme as the change in the weather. They all felt that they had hallooed before they were out of the wood; and, more than this, that their known reasons for rejoicing were even less than they had been before their hysterical dancing and fiddling; for now they all knew that which Remie had kept to himself, and suffered alone, for so many years.

As for Remie, his new mood was the blackest of all, for it was bitter with remorse. He realized now that he had done a cruel thing—a cowardly thing, too, under the circumstances—in disclosing the final hopeless phase of their tragic situation. It had been bad enough for them in the past, when they had believed that they might be freed, in extremity, by committing murder—nay, by no more than killing in self-defense; but now they must live on without hope, bereft of even that belief.

Breakfast was a dreary meal. Then the two men and Paul went out in the falling snow and worked at the woodpile. Later they let the cattle out for an airing.

It was close upon noon by then, and the snow was falling in larger and ever damper flakes. The red bull grumbled and combed his neck against a corner of a barn, the young cattle frisked about, and the cows chewed contentedly at the ragged flanks of a haystack. Adelard and Paul were in the kitchen, shaking the snow from their caps, and Remie was on the threshold, when the whole household was startled by a wild roar from the bull and frantic bellowings from the cows.

Paul grabbed the rifle from its wooden hooks against the wall and sprang for the door, where he was met by Remie, who snatched the rifle from him. The bellowing and roaring continued; and now dull thuds informed the family that the two horses, in their stalls, were contributing to the excitement by trying to kick out the log wall of their stable.

Remie ran for the barnyard, closely followed by his sons. His live stock had been raided several times before in other wilder-

nesses, once by wild cats and twice by bears; and now it was his belief that all the uproar was due to a bear or to a couple of lynxes or bobcats.

He saw a dark shape leap away from the charge of the red bull, brought the rifle to his shoulder, and fired. The dark shape stumbled, struggled up, and went away on three legs.

XI

PETER CRONK held to his course across the clearances by instinct. He could not see much farther than he could jump. A draft out of the east twirled the multitudinous falling clots of snow, weaving veils which at once obscured and confused the vision with their interminable white twistings and flickerings. He was within a few yards of the door when he saw the wolf and heard a forlorn whimper. The animal was wounded.

Half an hour later the old man was still fussing over the wolf, which he had lifted into his bunk. He had heated water and bathed its wounded leg, which had been broken as well as pierced by a bullet. He had set the bone straight, laying strong splints of wood along it, and binding it securely with strips torn from a cotton shirt. He had then dried the melted snow out of the animal's shaggy coat with what was left of the cotton shirt.

He was steadyng a pan of water, from which Toby was lapping thirstily, when the door opened. He turned quick as a flash, pan in hand, and beheld Remie Cherette and the lad Paul.

"Shut that door!" he cried.

Paul shut the door.

"Now what the hell d'ye want here?" he demanded.

"I shoot 'im for de 'urt he do my cow," replied Remie, with a note of uneasiness in his voice. "I don't kill 'im, no?—but he kill dat Polly cow, yes!"

"If he was to kill every damned critter on yer place, he wouldn't kill nothin' of yourn!" cried the old man furiously. "Where the hell did them horned cattle in yer barn come from, anyhow? Aye, an' the hosses, too? Ye be a fool, Remie Cherette! As ye be so quick with the gun, why ain't ye shot a hole in that there devil that's chasin' ye all over creation? Because ye're afeared to; but ye got courage enough to pull a trigger on my tame wolf, for killin' my cow! Say, I be a fool for worryin' my

head over ye an' yer troubles! I watch out daylight an' dark, rain an' shine an' snow, to save ye from that devilish brother of yourn if a mortal man kin do it. Then this here tame wolf comes along to me from God knows where—maybe for the very purpose of helpin' me keep a lookout for that damned *loup-garou* of yourn; an' jist because he happens to kill one of them fool cows I give ye to save myself the botheration of scaldin' out milk pails, ye up an' shoots him! I be fair sick of it. Ever since ye come on this lake, my life's been naught but worry an' sweatin' an' jumpin' an' trimblin'. I be fair sick of ye—an' now ye know it!"

"I shoot too quick, yes," returned the big Frenchman contritely. "I don't see what I shoot at—not very good."

Peter turned his back on them, and they retired in disgrace.

During the night the soft snow turned to warm rain, and the wind blew warmer and warmer; and by sunrise all the snow and most of the ice were gone. Young Paul appeared early at the old man's cabin, with a covered dish in his hand. Peter received him in silence. The wolf seemed to be doing as well as could possibly be expected after its injury and exposure, so the old man's temper was better than it had been the night before. Paul uncovered the dish, releasing an appetizing odor, and disclosing to view a mess of fried ham and fried potatoes, crisp and hot.

"I ain't got naught ag'in' yer ma," said Peter.

He and Toby emptied the dish, bite and bite about. Then Paul produced a small pot of salve from a pocket, and together the old man and the lad worked over the wolf's injured leg, contriving to anoint the wound without disturbing the splints. After that Peter lit his pipe and felt almost his old self again.

"It be a pity yer pa didn't think twice afore he pulled the trigger," he said. "That be the French of him. Now I got to stop in an' tend on Toby; an' who'll run the woods on the lookout for Roger?"

Paul shook his head drearily.

"For a spell now there won't be a soul on guard. There would 'a' been two right along from now on—me an' Toby," continued Peter. "Yer pa sure took a shot at the wrong wolf that time!"

"It would be worse if he shot de right wolf," said Paul.

"Sure it would! Ye be in a fix, whatever way ye look at it. Ye got to leave yer shootin' for others to do, when it comes to anything lookin' like a wolf, an' that's a fact. The best ye kin do's to set tight, an' never go out of jumpin' distance of the house, till Toby's leg be all better an' me an' him kin scout around the woods agin. Maybe Roger Cherette won't nose ye out any sooner this time than last; but ye never kin tell."

"I would take care of Toby, so you could go out with de gun."

Peter shook his head at that suggestion.

"A growed-up man like Remie can't go around shootin' tame wolves without costin' him somethin', Frenchman or no Frenchman," he said. "If that there young sport had come back, like he said he would, *he* could go out with the gun," he added.

At that moment the door opened, and a man staggered across the threshold and lay down on the floor. Peter grabbed up an ax and leaped forward. He took one look, and then tossed the ax aside, knelt, and lifted the intruder's head.

"Brandy!" he cried. "Look in the bunk—at the head of it—under the straw! Git a move on ye!"

It was Richard Barnston himself. He lay with his eyes closed and an apologetic smile on his pale face. Paul found the bottle and jumped with it. Peter laid hold of the cork with his two best teeth, worried it out, and thrust the neck of the bottle between Richard's lips.

Richard opened his mouth, shivered at the first gulp, gulped again and again, and then opened his eyes.

"I'll be all right in a jiffy," he said. "Had a hard trip in."

He smiled and closed his eyes again.

There were two bunks in the cabin, one above the other, and plenty of blankets. After removing Richard's wet boots and coat, and rolling him in a blanket, Peter and the boy shook up the straw and spread bedding in the upper bunk. Then they carried Barnston over and lifted him up and in. Not once during all this did the sportsman look or speak.

"Where'll you sleep now?" asked Paul.

"I'll make me a bed on the floor," replied the old man. "There be blankets a plenty, an' straw too."

"Is he sick? He looks very bad."

"He sure do! Tuckered out, I reckon. He don't look like he did when he was in

here before—that's a fact. Lost weight, I wouldn't wonder."

"I lost weight, right enough—and even so I had all I could carry," said a voice from the upper bunk; "but I'm willing to start right in putting it on again. If you happen to have a quart of soup handy—any kind of soup, if it's strong—I could do with it."

"I'll go fetch some soup," said Paul, darting to the door.

Peter Cronk went close to the bunk and looked in.

"The lad 'll fetch the soup," he said. "His ma's sure to have a pot of it hot on the stove. Ye look a mite better already; but where's yer dunnage? An' what kep' ye so long?"

"I played in hard luck," replied Richard. "What about a mug of tea, hot and not too strong, while I'm waiting for the soup? A dash of that same brandy wouldn't go badly in it."

The old man made fresh tea in a jiffy, filled a mug, and stiffened it with brandy. Richard drank deep and then sat up in his bunk.

"I needed that. You're a regular fairy godmother, Peter! If I'd had a dose of it when I took that first chill at Breen's place, and a tub of hot water and mustard to soak my feet in, I'd have been back long ago; but I hadn't, so there you are—and here I am. Those Breens couldn't look after a sick dog. They're no good—fools and cheats indoors and outdoors. I'm done with them. I was sick with a cold there, and they pretty nearly starved me to death. I kept my money under my pillow all the time. Finally I got up, rolled a pack, and set out on foot. It was a big pack, for I tried to tote everything I'd had to pay those Breens for. That's how I feel about them. I was on my way when Tom overhauled me, wanting another twenty-dollar bill; and that made me wild. Sick as I was, I went for him and beat him up. That's the last I've seen of him. When I'd made about five miles, I had to break my pack and cache half of it; and even so it was an hour before I could get my legs started again. All the trouble wasn't in my legs, either. I had fever, and was woozy in the head. I was flighty all the way in, off and on. I must have traveled very slowly, for I have hazy memories of making camp three or four times. I dropped the second half of my kit some-

where on the way, but I held on to my rifle until I was within a few miles of here."

He drank the rest of the tea and expressed a hope that the soup would soon be along.

"What brung ye back?" asked the old man.

"I said I'd come back, didn't I? So I came. I may as well be here as anywhere else just now. This is all material for my work—this woods stuff. I found some fairly good paper at Breen's—good enough to make notes and sketches on. It's in my pack—wherever that is."

"Ye can't fool me," said the old man gravely. "It warn't for the pictures of trees an' snow ye come back. Yer own idee be that it's the girl that brung ye back, an' that be true, in a sense; but God Almighty willed it so. He sent ye to Snowshoe to help me save them Cherettes from Remie's brother, the *loup-garou*."

"As you know so much, Peter—and I admit that you're a pretty good guesser—I'll tell you more. I felt that it was my duty, as an educated man, to return and enlighten you—you and the Cherettes—concerning that crazy old superstition. There's no such thing as a *loup-garou*, and there never was such a thing, and in entertaining such a belief you people are showing the credulity and ignorance of savages of a past age."

"Who told ye so?" asked the old man dryly. "Did they larn ye that at college?"

"They didn't have to," retorted Richard. "I knew it long before I went to school, just as every other civilized person knows it."

Just then the door opened and Paul Cherette entered, followed by his father. Paul carried a covered saucepan in his mittened hands, and Remie had a fur rug and blankets over one arm. Going straight to the bunk, Remie grasped the New Yorker's hand, and expressed his pleasure at seeing him again and his distress at hearing of his indisposition.

"I'll be fit as a fiddle in a few days, with Peter to nurse me and Mme. Cherette to make soup for me," replied Richard.

"What ye got there?" asked the old man, with a nod of his head at the things on Remie's arm. "If ye cal'late to loan me some beddin', I got plenty an' to spare for me an' my guests, includin' the pore wounded wolf."

"Adelard will come very soon, an' we

carry M. Richard to my 'ouse, where we 'ave more room an' de good cook, an' de soup always good and 'ot," explained Remie.

"Remie Cherette, I been yer friend from the first, runnin' the woods for ye an' study-in' to help ye; but if ye don't find out yer place damned quick an' stop in it, I'll drive ye off Snowshoe as sure as yer cursed brother driv ye off'n three good farms!" cried Peter Cronk. "Jumpin' desperation! If it warn't that I be cal'latin' to save yer life an' yer eternal soul, an' do my own soul a good turn into the bargain, I'd be sore tempted to chase ye out with an ax! What call have ye to make little of my house an' my cookin'? To hear ye talk, a stranger'd think *you* was the man of this Snowshoe country, an' the chopper an' stumper of these clearances! Ye shot Toby, an' now ye come insultin' me. Git out afore I chuck ye out!"

"Insult?" exclaimed Remie, aghast. "No! No! I do not insult my good friend! I wish to 'elp—to lend a 'and. You understan' me all wrong. Name of a devil! I try to please; an' for dat wolf—I regret dat shot from down deep in my 'eart!"

"Give me that saucepan," said Richard. "Thanks, Paul—spoon and all, complete. *You* seem to be normal, anyway. Wish I could say the same for the rest of you, with your talk of axes and wolves and insults! You are both crazy, in my opinion. What's this about a wolf? And who's Toby?"

He dipped into the soup without waiting for the answers, and went right ahead with the dipping while Peter told him about the wolf and the wounding of the wolf. He passed the saucepan back to the boy and took a look at the occupant of the lower bunk, craning his neck to do so.

"A fine big wolf!" he said. "I don't blame you for feeling sore, Peter. If you aren't crazy—all of you—it's a wonder; and you soon will be if you keep on with this damned foolishness. I like you all, or I wouldn't say what I'm going to say. It's what I came back here to say. This *loup-garou* stuff is all rot—worse than foolishness. It's a sin. Your ignorance is amazing—disgusting—terrible. You are either cowards or fools, and on the verge of insanity, in either case. To believe in such things, and fear them, would drive any one mad."

Remie did not understand all of this, having a slow ear for English, but what he understood shocked and astonished him. He gazed in silence at the young man in the upper bunk. Peter smiled grimly, but saved his breath. The man from New York would live and learn, in his opinion.

"But it is true!" cried young Paul. "It is an old curse on de family of Cherette since 'undreds of years ago. It is my uncle now who is de cursed one—de *loup-garou*."

"Did you ever see him turn into a wolf?"

"No, but—"

The lad told the whole story, with Remie slipping a word in now and then, and old Peter and Richard Barnston listening intently. Richard sank back on his pillow during the telling, but his interest and attention did not waver. He sat up again at the conclusion of the lad's effort.

"Have you anything to add to Paul's story?" he asked of the others.

"Yes—I know more yet about de *loup-garou*," replied Remie.

"I'll fortify myself with the rest of that soup, before you tell it," said Richard.

Peter passed the saucepan to him from where it had been keeping hot on the hearth of the stove, and he ate while Remie talked. Remie talked for ten minutes, earnestly and excitedly, waving his arms.

"An' that ain't all," declared old Peter Cronk, and straightway added all that he had heard from the cockeyed half-breed, years ago, and from the chopper in the lumber camp even more years ago.

"But the fact remains that not one of you ever saw a man turn into a wolf, or a wolf turn into a man," said Richard, passing the empty saucepan to the lad. "It's all hearsay with you—yarns and traditions. If you want to know what I really think about this particular case that's causing all of you so much anxiety and hysterical alarm and labor and loss, I'll tell you." He raised his head and looked at Remie. "I hope you'll take it in the spirit in which I say it—the spirit of friendship. I like you, and want to help you. Otherwise I wouldn't have come back. If I didn't feel as I do about you, I'd let you keep right on scaring yourselves crazy. In my opinion, this chap Roger is playing you for a fool, Remie Cherette!"

Remie shook his head, but said nothing. He did not quite see the point; but Peter Cronk was sharper.

"Why would he say he was a *loup-garou*, if he wasn't?" demanded the old man.

"Perhaps because he is crazy, or perhaps because he is just bad. It's easy money, whatever his reason is," returned Richard.

Adelard Cherette, who had entered the cabin ten or fifteen minutes before, slapped his hand on his thigh and exclaimed:

"Good! Dat is right, I wouldn't wonder! Uncle Roger is a bad man—a very bad man. He is a devil, yes—but maybe he ain't de kind of devil he say he is. Easy money, you bet! I t'ink what you say plenty times, but I don't believe it till I 'ear you say it."

Remie turned upon him and spoke quickly and angrily in French.

"Think it over," said Richard. "And please give *madame* my thanks for her delicious soup. Now I'll indulge in a nap, if you'll all excuse me."

III

THE Breens were law-abiding citizens—the game laws excepted—and would almost as readily have committed suicide as statutory murder; but, for all that, they were far from being an estimable family. They were cowards; they were sly; they were greedy; and they were as crooked as corkscrews.

They had made a very good thing out of Mr. Richard Barnston, but had hoped to make a better; and when Tom, the guide, returned to the paternal roof with a sore eye and a split lip, and admitted that he had failed to collect another twenty, both his father and his mother had pointed out to him that the sport was a sick man, and in no condition to travel either fast or far. His recent outburst of physical violence, they shrewdly argued, would probably be his last, and the things he carried would be of no use to anybody if he should happen to die in the woods. The Breens had already been well paid for the articles in Richard's pack—but, even so, why should they be left in the woods to rot? His rifle, too, was a very fine one, and his watch was of gold, and his waterproof pocketbook was lined with more than rubber.

"It ain't our fault that he's took to the woods like a breechy steer, nor it won't be no fault of ourn if he was to die of pewmomy on his chist, but it would be a sinful waste if we was to leave what he totes to

rot on the moss along with himself," said the elder Breen.

So Tom Breen followed the sportsman. He followed cautiously, and at a safe distance, but close enough to see and take advantage of the gradual jettisoning of the other's dunnage. Whatever the staggering Richard cast off, the stealthy Thomas picked up.

At night Tom lay within a few yards of Richard's fire, near enough to hear the sick but determined sportsman talk foolishly and wildly under the influence of the fever which got the better of his wits and his legs after sundown. Richard went forward so slowly that Tom had to drag his feet to avoid running over him; and so young Breen had plenty of time for thought.

He thought that it would not be a great while now before Richard lay down for the last time; and that rifles of the same make look very much alike, though some are very much better than others; and that, when a rich young man without dependents runs the wet woods when he should be in bed, and dies as the result of his indiscretion, those who housed him last, and who once even rubbed his chest with hot goose grease, are morally his heirs. He wondered what that big gold watch would fetch "second-handed." He wondered why the sportsman wanted to return to Snowshoe Lake at this time of year, instead of going home to the steam heat and fleshpots of New York.

Each morning Tom Breen looked out hopefully for Richard Barnston's corpse, and each morning he was disappointed. The fellow was certainly a game sport!

"But he can't make it," Tom assured himself. "It ain't humanly possible. He's took his death on his chest half a dozen times. He'll lay down an' quit, an' pass out, before he gets through to old Cronk's place or old Sam Kell's place—that's a sure thing!"

He picked up the sick man's discarded rifle, murmuring:

"It 'll be his boots next."

But an opportunity to pick up Richard's boots did not occur. Tom looked out from the edge of the woods just in time to see the sick sportsman stagger against Peter's door and reel from sight. He was disgusted, and he said so; but before facing the long, wet homeward way, he took a snoop around on the chance of discovering the reason for Mr. Barnston's determined return to this particular area of desolation.

From safe cover he noticed the enlargement of Sam Kell's shack, and its air of comfort. He saw white curtains at one window and red curtains at another, and knew that womenfolk had come to Snowshoe Lake. He had not heard of Sam's death, and he wondered if the old man had married a wife; but that didn't seem likely.

He saw a big man with a dark beard, whom he did not recognize as any one known to him, and a big man without a beard, who was equally new to him. He saw a well grown lad come running from the direction of the other house and, after a few hurried words with the two men at the crosscut saw, dart into the enlarged and remodeled habitation. Tom was interested. He moved nearer, crouching behind a screen of alders; and where the screen ended he sat down on his pack—the sportsman's pack, rather—and waited.

He noticed that the little barns had been repaired, and the formidable bulk of the woodpiles did not escape his observing eyes. Presently he saw the lad come out and return in the direction of old Cronk's cabin, carrying something with both hands, and accompanied by the man with the beard. Again the door of the remodeled house opened; and when he saw Jeanne Cherette on the threshold, he grinned. He did not know who she was, or how or why or when she had come to Snowshoe Lake, but he was quite sure that she was the reason of Richard Barnston's return.

Peter Cronk slept comfortably on his bed of straw, deerskins, and blankets on the floor, and the wolf and the sportsman were comfortable in the bunks. For a time the exercise of hospitality put the old man in a happy humor. These were his very own guests. They had come to his door of their own free will. He cooked as he had never cooked before, though he had always possessed a knack and a taste for the culinary art. He made broth which was quite equal to Mme. Cherette's broth. Leaving Paul to keep an eye on his patients, he went out with the old gun, recharged with No. 5 shot instead of the silver bullets, and killed plump partridges.

Old Peter's patient was on his feet again within three days of his arrival, and two days later he was able to take the air. He had talked so earnestly and learnedly and fearlessly about savage superstitions that

by the time he was able to walk out and breathe the frosty air, the old man's faith in the *loup-garou* was seriously shaken, and there was a doubt even in the mind of young Paul Cherette.

Richard walked all the way across to the other house, to pay his respects to Mme. Cherette and Jeanne; and there he remained until the old man appeared and dragged him home to dinner. He walked that way again early in the afternoon, and again sat tight beside the Cherette stove until Peter dragged him home to supper. The same thing happened the next day, and the next, and the next.

"How d'ye feel?" asked Peter one morning just after breakfast.

"Fine and dandy, thank you," replied the sportsman.

"Then I reckon we may's well back-track along the way ye come in, an' pick up yer rifle an' yer dunnage," said Peter.

"I'm not worrying about those things. They'd be hard to find, and I can do very well without them."

"What about the paper to make yer pictures on?"

"Birch bark will do just as well."

"Birch bark, hey? Come along out an' cut some, then. I'll give Paul a holler to come over an' set with Toby while we're gone."

Paul came without being shouted for, and Peter and Richard set out in quest of bark. The old man led the way, and reached the woods without opening the Cherette home to their view. Richard smiled as he followed. They had been out about twenty minutes when Richard halted and pointed to a fine large white birch on their left.

"There's bark enough to last me a year," he said.

The old man glanced at the tree without pausing in his stride; so the young man got into motion again, and again smiled to himself. During the next half hour he pointed out four more big birches with bark that was obviously of the finest quality, and four times did the old man glance without pausing and stride on without comment. Richard's smile grew strained and more strained; and at last he stepped aside to the foot of a canoe tree, sat down on the butt of a blowdown, and lit his pipe.

Peter went on for about a hundred yards before his fifth sense told him that he was no longer being followed. Turning, he saw

the first puff from Richard's pipe rise above a clump of little firs and disperse in the frosty sunshine.

"Hey!" he cried. "Come on! We ain't there yet."

Receiving no answer, he snorted, swore, then retraced his steps and turned aside and glared at Richard. The glare was met and returned steadily until it cooled and shifted.

"I've gone as far as I intend to go this morning," said Richard. "We have already passed enough good bark to build a fleet of canoes, and all I want is a dozen little pieces. What's eating you, anyhow? You've not been yourself these last few days. What's your trouble? Out with it!"

"What's eatin' me? What's my trouble?" cried the old man. "Trouble a plenty, God knows—or maybe He don't. I wouldn't wonder but He don't. If it ain't one thing, it's another, till I be fair sick of livin'! Had a man ought to try to do right, or hadn't he? Sometimes I don't know which. When them Cherettes come in on Snowshoe, I was troubled with a queer feelin' in my brain—a kind of squirmin' an' twistin' in it whenever I used it. Next I was sick an' seen visions, an' the trouble in my brain went away. I cal'lated the hand of God was in it all, warnin' me to save my soul; so I had the *loup-garou* an' my soul to worry about, in place of the sore spot in my skull. I'd lived all to myself, an' for myself, y' understand; an' in my visions I seen how my soul was damned if I didn't do different. I was as certain sure God Almighty was givin' me a chance to save my soul by savin' them Cherettes from the *loup-garou* that was after them as if He'd walked in at the door in a cloud of fire an' told me so with His own lips; so I sot to work at watchin' out for that there Roger, man or beast. I scooped around the woods night an' day, an' come within the twitch of a finger of shootin' yer own head off'n yer neck with two silver bullets. Hard work it was, an' scary work, too; but I was certain it was for my everlastin' salvation, an' I kep' right at it. I wanted to do the French folks a good turn, too; but it warn't easy, that job of watchin' out for a wolf or a man. One day I see a wolf, an' threw my ax at him—an' missed him, thank God, for it was Toby. An' then Remie Cherette shot at my tame wolf, that I reckoned was sent to me by the Almighty Himself to help me hunt that devil Roger, an' I was that mad

I was fair sick of my good work. I prayed for ye to come, an' ye come! I was glad. I figgered how I needed ye, an' I was glad; but now—hell! If there ain't no sich thing as a *loup-garou*, an' nothin' to save the Cherettes from, then I been sweatin' for nothin'—for no use to them nor a mite of use to my own soul. That be my trouble; an' that ain't all of it, neither!"

"My friend, you are wrong," replied Richard gravely. "If there is no man-wolf threatening your friends—and there most assuredly is not—there is still the man. He has driven them to the verge of insanity—the parents, anyway; and if they continue to believe in that old foolishness, and are not saved from him, he will drive them over the verge. So why do you complain? The Cherettes are still in danger, and still need help. So long as they believe in that damned curse, they are in danger of being damned by it. The wisest way to save them is to bring them to reason with argument, as I brought you and Paul to reason. Another way is to bag that fellow Roger, who is either a lunatic or a very bad man without heart or conscience."

"Bag him? D'ye mean shoot him?"

"No, not quite that. I wouldn't go that far myself, nor would I advise you to. It would do to get hold of him and show him up for the faker and blackguard he really is—or lunatic, as the case may be. He's not a *loup-garou*, anyhow; and once that was proved to Remie's satisfaction he would be powerless. You've still got your good work cut out for you, and I can still be of help to you; so cheer up, for Heaven's sake!"

"That is true, I do believe," said the old man. "Ye've got a smart head on yer shoulders. I kin see reason when it's showed to me. A man don't have to turn into a wolf to be a devil. I git ye, Richard! The Cherettes still need help, and I still be the man to help 'em. A man don't have to be bad to do harm, neither. That there Roger ain't the only man that's aimin' trouble at them poor, foolish, ignorant Cherettes."

"How's that? Who else is after them?"

"A sport. Richard Barnston's his name, far's I know."

"Me? The Cherettes in danger from me? What do you mean by that?"

"Now hearken to me. I be old enough to talk to ye. Yer blood be all English blood, an' the Cherette blood be all French,

with a mite of Injun, maybe. I dunno about the Injun blood; but that don't matter one way or t'other. Yer bloods be different, an' that ain't the biggest difference betwixt the Cherettes an' yerself. The Cherettes be ignorant folks, born an' riz in the woods these two or three hundred years—more ignorant nor I be, even, an' the breed longer in the woods nor my folks has been. They look grand in here on Snowshoe Lake, the same as I do—grand to make pictures of; but how'd they look to live with in the place ye come from?"

"What are you driving at? I'm no good at riddles. What's the answer?"

"What d'ye cal'late to do with Jeanne Cherette?"

"So that's it! I had a suspicion that you were going to pull something like that! Well, I'll tell you. I don't calculate to do anything to Jeanne Cherette."

"Ye'd walk off when it suits ye to walk, would ye, an' leave her to fret out her heart here in the woods? Be that yer game?"

"Fret her heart out? What for? What about?"

"Young man, ye be right smart when it comes to *loups-garous* an' book larnin', but ye be a damn fool when it comes to women! I wouldn't put it no stronger 'n that. I wouldn't name ye for a blackguard, nor a skunk, nor nothin' like that, for I like ye; but if ye don't cal'late to marry that young woman—an' what the devil ye'd do with her, once ye got her out of the woods, is more'n yerself knows—ye'd best leave her alone. Keep away from her! Keep out of that there kitchen! Ye'd be a fool to marry her, so leave her be. She'll make a good wife for a bushwhacker. Yer goin's on be ridin' my conscience, for I like that there Jeanne, an' I like yerself. I'd be right sorry to chase ye off'n the Snowshoe country, but I see my duty."

"Do you mean to imply that she's in love with me?"

The old man snorted at that.

"Do you mean that you don't want me to remain here any longer?"

"I like yer company, an' maybe ye could lend a hand if that there Roger was to turn up; but it be ag'in' my duty to see ye settin' all day by the Cherette stove, a rollin' yer eyes at Jeanne."

"How the devil do you know that I roll my eyes? Why do you think so? Roll my eyes! Good Lord, you talk as if I was a professional lady-killer!"

"Ye kin take yer ch'ice."

"Do you mean to say that I'm to keep away from the Cherettes altogether? I've been trying to talk that crazy old superstition out of Remie's head."

"Ye kin go visitin' twice every week. Talkin' won't help Remie."

"You're of a suspicious nature, Peter. I didn't think it of you."

"I got to do right by them Cherettes. They was wished onto me by the Almighty Himself, for my sins of selfishness."

"In that case, I'll not make it any harder for you than I can help."

XIII

ON the way home Richard thought hard, but kept the result to himself. Peter, vastly relieved at being done with that unpleasant duty, and at Richard's reasonable attitude, talked enough for two. They had plenty of bark, and Richard made sketches of the old man and Paul and the wolf that same day. Peter and young Cherette were much impressed by the quick drawings. After examining each in turn from every possible angle, the old man exclaimed:

"By the livin' jew's-harps! I'd know it for myself anywheres; an' this here looks more like Paul nor the lad do himself!"

Winter settled down thick and tight on the Snowshoe country. By the middle of December snow lay two feet deep on the level and five feet deep in drifts. Peter set a short line of traps; and he and Richard took enough exercise in the woods and at the woodpile to keep them in the pink of condition. Paul Cherette spent most of his waking hours with them, or with the wolf in the old man's cabin. Toby flourished, and was soon able to limp about the place.

Peter's guard on Lame Squaw was relaxed, for he now thought as lightly and scornfully of *loups-garous* as Richard did. He continued to keep an eye skinned for Roger Cherette, however, but as a bad man, or a crazy one, rather than a devil. He looked in at the Cherettes every morning and every evening, if only for a few minutes each time, and visited the snow-hung valley of the brook three times a week. He felt that these were sufficient precautions under the altered circumstances.

Richard Barnston did not say a word about returning to civilization. On squares of birch bark of various sizes he made scores of sketches of Peter's cabin and the

other habitation, of trees and log barns and snow-capped stacks, and of all the inhabitants of Snowshoe, human and otherwise. He tramped the woods with Peter on the late Sam's webs, did his share of ax work at the woodpile, and contributed one fat buck and a dozen partridges to the larder before Christmas. He visited Remie's family twice a week. His manner was more reserved and thoughtful than it had been before Peter's serious talk to him, but he continued to try to disabuse the minds of the Cherettes of their terrifying errors in the matter of curses and red magic.

Remie Cherette felt his heart change toward the young man from the great city. He was moved by the same fear that had caused Peter Cronk to speak so downrightly to Richard, and the curtailing of Richard's visits to only two a week did not lessen his fear. Unlearned as he was in such things, he knew the drawings on bark to be the work of a genius. Only an eyeless person, or one mentally deficient, could have been blind to their truth and strength. The red bull knee-deep in snow, Jeanne stooping over the pot in which doughnuts browned in boiling lard, the big wolf on three legs, old Peter with his rank pipe protruding from tangled whiskers, Adelard swinging an ax—here was truth, here was life itself, to be seen and recognized as surely as in a living face.

So the young man was a master of his art! Not only was he a scholar, and of a great city, and rich enough to hire a guide and even to be cheated by a guide, but he was a great man; and this great man had come back to Snowshoe, and settled down there, because of Jeanne's pretty face! There could be no two opinions about that.

True, Richard said that he had come to save them from the *loup-garou* by teaching them that no such thing existed or had ever existed; but who would be fooled by such a story as that? Not Remie Cherette, certainly! Remie knew what had brought the young man back, and what was keeping him in the frost-bound wilderness.

For all of Richard's arguments, Remie remained firm in his conviction that his own brother was a *loup-garou*. He did not argue, and he remembered his manners, but he dissented violently in his mind, and anger grew in his heart. What right had this man from New York to deny the old tradition, and to laugh at those who believed in it? In denying the *loup-garou* he

denied history—the family history of the Cherettes—a thing almost as sacred to Remie as his religion. What history could be truer than that handed down by one's father and grandfather, passed on from generation to generation?

Remie knew that Jeanne now thought of nobody and nothing but Richard Barnston. Mme. Cherette knew the same thing. The fact was obvious. The girl was bemused. She did her work in a dream. While she was in the kitchen, her eyes were seldom away from the window that faced Peter's cabin for more than a few seconds at a time. She kept a peephole melted clear on the frosty pane. At his step outside the door and the fumble of his mitened hand at the latch, her smooth cheeks glowed and her eyelids drooped.

Her mother charged her with it, and so great was the girl's confusion that she could not say a word. When her father charged her with it, she covered her face with her hands and wept. If Richard had been present at that moment, Remie would have forgotten his good manners and the courtesy due to a guest. He watched Richard more and more closely; but nothing could have been more circumspect and inoffensive than the young man's behavior during his two weekly visits.

Richard was aware of Remie Cherette's thoughts and feelings toward himself, and was angry. He was angry with himself as well as with Remie; and he wondered at that.

What had he done? Nothing! He had not harmed any one on Snowshoe by deed or thought. He had returned to Snowshoe, instead of to civilization, for the reason which he had given. That was true—but was it the whole truth? Would he have been so anxious to disabuse their minds of that savage superstition if Jeanne had not caught his beauty loving eyes?

He was honest. He tried to be honest even with himself; so he answered his question honestly, though doing so made him feel uncomfortable. The answer was no! But for the girl's charm, he would undoubtedly have left old Peter Cronk and the ignorant Cherettes to battle with their childish but horrid fears as best they could, without his help.

Even so, what harm had he done? What harm was he likely to do? Could he not admire a girl's eyes, and the shape of her head, and the grace of her body—yes, and

even take pleasure in her voice and words—without arousing low suspicions in the minds of Peter Cronk and Remie Churette? Peter had behaved very well, despite the imbecility of his suspicions. The old man had spoken frankly, and then had shown no further sign of distrust. Peter was forgiven, but not so Remie Churette. Damn the ignorant bushwhacker! By what prehistoric convention was a man supposed to marry every woman he admired?

"I'll clear out next week!" Richard exclaimed. "I'll let their *loup-garou* chase them again. It'll serve that ignorant, low-minded savage right for judging other people by his own instincts—confound him!"

He did not clear out next week. For nine days running, however, he kept away from the Churette house, as an expression of his disapproval of Remie Churette's earthiness of mind and spirit. He tramped the frost-bound woods day after day; and the tame wolf, whose broken leg was now as good as new, sometimes traveled with him.

When he next called on the Chettes, he took Peter and the wolf with him, said scarcely a word to Jeanne, treated Remie with elaborate and unsmiling politeness, said not a word on the subject of superstitions, made a brilliant sketch of Mme. Churette frying pancakes—and then refused to remain to supper. Peter and Toby remained, but Richard went home alone, and cooked and ate in solitary indignation.

"I'll teach that narrow-minded, ignorant peasant not to judge his betters by his own ignoble standards!" he said to the sizzling frying pan.

But he was worried, fearing that his behavior might have hurt Mme. Churette and Jeanne. After his lonely supper he lay in the lower bunk, smoked his pipe, and thought about Jeanne. As he had often done before, he meditated on his feelings toward the girl.

Then he wondered about her feelings toward him, which was a thing he had never done before. He had always taken it for granted that she found his talk entertaining, but beyond that he had never given a thought to the subject of his effect upon her. He was blissfully ignorant of his personal attractions, being in this particular one of the most modest of men, though he had a very good opinion of himself as an artist, and a yet better one of himself as a canoeman and woodsman. He had en-

joyed many friendships with women, but he had never once even suspected that a woman was in love with him.

Now, however, he wondered how Jeanne Churette felt about him. Things which Peter had said on that day of bark gathering came back to him with disturbing significance. Could it be that the girl liked him—liked him for something besides his entertaining talk about cities and far countries, and his drawings on bark? Could that be so? He had caught a significant expression in her beautiful eyes several times, come to think of it; and there had been a tone in her voice this evening that had puzzled him. Had her hand lingered in his? Nonsense! She was lonely—that was all. She was bored with her stupid, superstitious father. A stranger was a change, a welcome relief; for she had more brains than all the other members of that family combined.

This is what Richard told himself, and much more to the same tune; but deep in his consciousness he felt an uneasy but not entirely unpleasant sensation of doubt.

XIV

ONE night in the second week of January a peddler on snowshoes, with a huge pack on his back, knocked on the door of the Breen house below the mouth of Ox-bow, and then stepped into the kitchen without waiting for an invitation. He clattered right in with his big webs still on his feet, letting a blast of icy air in after him that would have crimped the steam of the teakettle to frost if old Breen had not jumped from his chair, quick as lightning, and shut the door.

The oil lamp on the table did not shed much light, but enough to show the intruder's great pack and shaggy cap of fur, and to reveal to the indignant Breens what manner of man he was. Tom saw that the offhandish stranger was neither as tall nor as broad as himself, though sizable, and that he stooped beneath his pack, as if with weariness. His eyes and nose and mouth were lost in the shadow of his cap's hairy peak.

Tom jumped up and ripped out an oath. "What the hell?" he cried. "This ain't no hotel! Walk right in, would ye, an' not even bother to shut the door? A lousy peddler, at that! For two buttons I'd throw ye out agin quicker 'n ye come in!"

In silence the other unbuckled a strap

on his breast, letting his pack slide down his back and settle on the floor with a thud. He stepped forward a pace, to clear the tails of his snowshoes from the pack; and this brought him nearer the lamp, and so into a stronger light. Then he pulled off his cap and looked at Tom Breen.

Tom, who had advanced to deliver a second belligerent speech, lost color and stepped back; and no wonder! A brave man might have recoiled, without shame, from those eyes—and Tom was a coward.

Then old Breen received a shoot from the stranger's eyes. Though he was not absolutely without courage, he felt a chilly airiness in the region of his stomach and a curious sensation at the base of his scalp, as if the hairs were crawling. The stranger turned again to Tom, and drew back his lips, so that his pointed teeth gleamed in the lamplight.

"You t'row me out, yes?" he queried.

"Take off yer webs," said Tom Breen, with an effort. "Make yerself to home."

The other sneered openly, looking around at all three of the Breens. Then he laughed derisively and stooped to untie the thongs of his snowshoes.

The Breens had finished their evening meal fully two hours before the peddler's arrival, and the few dishes that had been used were back in the cupboard; but when the intruder seated himself at the table and announced, in significant tones, that he had not eaten since noon, and then only dry bread and tea, Mrs. Breen and Tom immediately became busy. Butter was cut out of a salty crock in the cellar, and apple sauce was spooned liberally out of a jar in the pantry. Ham and eggs were fried, biscuits were heated, coffee was made, and a great chunk of gingerbread was produced.

The peddler looked on with a leer. When all had been set in front of him, he fell to without comment. His appetite satisfied, he pushed back from the table without a word of thanks. He produced a pipe and eyed it significantly, whereupon Tom jumped to him with a plug of tobacco.

He took the tobacco with his left hand, and with the right drew a knife with a heavy-backed eight-inch blade from a hidden sheath inside his coat. As he balanced the knife across his palm, the three Breens stared at it with desperate intentness. He fixed Tom with a glare out of those dominating eyes—eyes so extraordinary in fire and expression that even the dull Breens

knew that their owner was either utterly and dangerously demented, or as utterly and as dangerously bad.

"It is a good knife," he said, widening his horrid grin. "Very good for to slice tobac'—yes, you bet yer!"

He sliced a pipeful. The films of tobacco curled off before that razor-keen edge as if by magic. He filled and lit his pipe, and calmly pocketed the plug, at the same time treating Tom to a peculiarly unnerving and bloodcurdling glance. Then he flicked his right hand—just a flick, almost too slight and swift for the eye to catch—and there was a flash in the lamplight and then a smart thud against the wall at the far end of the kitchen. When the Breens turned their horrified eyes in that direction, they beheld the knife sticking into a log of the wall, and the heavy haft of it still swinging.

The peddler laughed jeeringly, strode across the room, wrenched the knife out of the tough wood, and replaced it in the hidden sheath. He returned to his chair, which was the most comfortable one in the kitchen, and leaned back and raised his heels to the edge of the table.

"You know a man name of Cherette—Remie Cherette?" he queried.

The Breens were so terrified that they did not instantly understand that a question had been asked—a civil question, at that.

"Cherette!" exploded the stranger, in a voice so cruel and furious, and with a look so devilish that the men trembled and the woman uttered a yelp of terror.

"Cherette!" whispered Tom. "No! Remie Cherette, you said? No—never heard the name before—not to remember. No—I don't know him. Never even heard of him—not to remember, anyhow—nowheres on this river, nor anywheres hereabouts."

The other lowered his feet from the table, leaned forward in his chair, and fixed his demoralizing gaze upon the guide.

"Use de brain," he said very quietly, very softly. "T'ink 'ard. Big man, dat Remie Cherette, wid big whisker. Frenchman from Quebec. Got a wife, an' t'ree children, an' some big bark canoe. You got a brain, yes? You best use 'im now—or you don't use 'im never agin, maybe!"

Tom Breen's third-rate mind worked as it had never worked before. He expected to see the peddler's hand slip out of sight

for that knife at any moment. A first-rate mind could not have worked harder or more successfully.

He thought of the eighteen-foot bark canoe which Richard Barnston had brought down from Snowshoe Lake, and which now lay on the threshing floor of the barn. The sportsman had told him that it had been bought from old Peter Cronk, and at the time Tom had wondered why Peter had constructed such a freighter as that. He thought of the people he had seen from the screen of alders when he followed Barnston up the river and up Lame Squaw brook to the clearances on Snowshoe Lake.

"I seen a big man 'way in on Snowshoe," he gabbled. "Stranger to me. Big brown beard—that's right, an' kinder French-lookin', too. There was another big feller, but he was a lot younger, an' there was a lump of a lad. I seen them on Snowshoe Lake. They'd built on to old Sam Kell's shack, an' made a good house of it. They was strangers to me. I seen a girl, too—a young woman. I wouldn't wonder but they're French. I didn't hear them talk. I was huntin', an' kinder in a hurry to git back to camp. Yes, the oldest man was big, an' his whiskers was big an' dark; an' the girl had red cheeks an' black hair."

"Dat's them!" said the peddler in a new voice. "Dat's Remie an' Adelard an' Paul an' Jeanne! Remie's wife would be inside, cookin', yes. Long ways into the woods, what? Snowshoe Lake, you say?"

"Yes, on Snowshoe. It's quite a ways off, but it ain't hard to find. I seen how they'd fixed up the little old barns, an' done some fencin', besides makin' a good house of old Kell's shack. Smart folks, I guess. They sure had everything lookin' slick."

"Not so damn smart as Remie t'ink for, maybe," returned the other, with a chuckle.

It was an honest-to-goodness chuckle. There was mirth in it, and not the faintest suggestion of derision. The Breens began to breathe in a normal manner again. The terrifying stranger was pleased. Perhaps, with luck, they would escape with their lives, after all. It was a welcome thought.

News of the whereabouts of the new settlers on Snowshoe was evidently the cause of his change of temper. Apparently he had come a long way in search of them. Well, then, the sooner he resumed his journey the better; and the thing to do in the

meantime was to keep him in his present humor. Their fear of him was so acute, and their desire to get him peacefully out of the house and on his way was so keen, that they did not feel the least curiosity concerning the reason of his search for Remie Cherette.

The peddler leaned back in his chair again, returned his heels to the edge of the table, and blew a slow cloud of smoke. Tom found a stub of pencil and a piece of paper, and made a map, which showed the left bank of the river from the mouth of Oxbow to the mouth of Lame Squaw, with the mouths of three other streams between, and the course of Lame Squaw up to Snowshoe Lake. It was not drawn to scale, and it made the distance between the two ends of Lame Squaw look as if it could be covered in a hop, a step, and a jump.

Tom gave it to the peddler and explained it at length. The stranger was gracious.

"Good!" he said. "Good! I start on de mornin'!"

At that, all the three Breens decided to sit up, wide awake, all night. Mrs. Breen ventured to tell the uninvited guest that the best bed in the house was at his disposal. He hitched his chair around, grinned at her—there was more than a suggestion of derision in that grin—and said that he never slept. He turned his chair so that his back was to the lamp; and as the table was of no use to him in this position, he rested his heels on the wood box.

For an hour silence reigned in the kitchen. The Breens were afraid to speak. The silence was broken by Mrs. Breen, who, having fallen asleep, fell off her chair with a thump and a scramble. The three men were on their feet and staring at her before she realized what had happened. There was the peddler with the long knife in his hand, all his pointed teeth laid bare, and a hellish glimmer in his eyes.

The woman gabbled an explanation. The peddler sheathed his knife, ordered them all to bed, and returned to his seat. The Breens left the kitchen, but they did not blink an eye again that night. They sat in one bedroom, behind a locked door, armed with a rifle, a shotgun, and an ax, gazing at the door and trembling at every sound, until dawn grayed the frosty window and then lit it with rose and gold.

They found the formidable peddler asleep in his chair. The stove was hot, the kettle was steaming, and slices of bacon

were sizzling in the pan, before Tom ventured to wake him. To accomplish an awakening, young Breen clattered the poker against the hearth of the stove; at which the unwelcome guest came out of his chair with a jump, and slipped a hand into the front of his coat at the moment of opening his eyes.

"Breakfast's ready," said Tom.

The other blinked, sniffed, glared around him, and then, without a word, pulled his chair up to the table.

XV

RICHARD BARNSTON thought over his equivocal position on Snowshoe Lake, and the attitude of Remie Cherette which made it equivocal, until his indignation became so hot and high that it clouded his reason. One bright morning he made up a pack of blankets and grub, gave Peter Cronk fifty dollars, and fixed to his feet the webs of the late Sam Kell's workmanship.

"Young man, ye won't be gone long, I reckon," said Peter. "Ye'll sure be back come summertime."

"Not on your life, Peter!" he returned. "The place for me is where people trust me. I'm accustomed to being trusted!"

He set out for civilization without a backward glance or a look over his shoulder in the direction of the Cherette farmstead. Peter stowed the bills away in a safe place, and smiled knowingly as he did so; for the old man was as sure that Richard Barnston would come back to Snowshoe as if he had read a prophecy to that effect in the Old Testament.

Barnston entered the forest at its nearest point, and moved toward the valley of Lame Squaw on a long slant. He padded along at a pace which he did not intend to maintain for more than a few miles, starting the dry snow in spurting and vanishing clouds before him. He was anxious to get the first jump of the long journey over with, to place the Snowshoe clearings far behind him, before his righteous indignation began to cool; for in the back of his mind he knew that his resolve would weaken, and his courage, too, with the passing of his anger, and that he would be gnawed by remorse for not having bade farewell to Jeanne.

He was going at reduced speed when he met the line of the brook, which he followed without descending into the narrow valley. He had made a late start, so that noon

found him still about three miles from the junction of brook and river, and exceedingly thirsty. He turned, then, and went over the drift-overhung brow, jumping and sliding with tumbling masses of wind-packed snow. He regained his balance in a clump of young spruces, dropped his pack there, and, with kettle and ax, went out on the level surface of the frozen stream, with the intention of filling his kettle at an air hole in the ice, or, if out of luck, at a hole of his own chopping.

The first thing that caught his eye, as he broke clear of the thick brushwood, was a trail of snowshoe tracks stamped deep and clean. His first thought, at that sight, was of Roger Cherette. Some one had gone upstream on webs of a longer and narrower shape than those commonly made and used in that province. The edges of the imprints were as sharp as if they had been stamped but a minute ago; but, as there was no wind, it might have been hours since the passing of the snowshoer.

"Those are Quebec rackets," said Barnston. "If it's that fellow Roger—if it should happen to be he—and why shouldn't it?—he'll put it all over that fool Remie again. Peter won't know how to handle him."

His thirst for hot tea was forgotten. He shouldered his pack and set off upstream, on the trail of the intruder, at a round pace. The fellow might be just around the next bend, for all that Richard knew to the contrary.

The man who traveled up Lame Squaw on those long and narrow webs was the peddler who had passed a night with the Breens. He was within a mile of the clearings on the lake when Richard Barnston turned in pursuit nine miles away. He was traveling fast, for he was hard as nails, and the pack he carried did not weigh much, despite its bulk.

He did not halt at noon to boil his kettle and fry bacon, planning to eat a more elaborate meal, not of his own cooking, a little later; but he did not plan to eat his first dinner on Snowshoe Lake with the Cherettes. Long and far had he searched for those honest and simple souls, and yet, now that he was within a mile of them, he decided not to call on them until after dark. He would dine with the old man of whom Tom Breen had spoken, and eat supper with the Cherettes. Upon reaching the

edge of the nearest clearing he skirted it, keeping out of sight of the remodeled house until he reached the point of woods nearest to the lesser habitation.

Old Peter Cronk was smoking his first pipe of the afternoon and hoping that young Barnston would return before fly time, and the tame wolf was curled up between the stove and the bunks, when the door swung open without warning and the peddler entered the cabin. Peter knew him in a flash, as surely as if his name had been printed across his chest.

For a second the old man stared, and then he reached for an ax; but before the motion was completed, and just as the other's hand slipped into the front of his several coats, the big wolf came wide awake and made two jumps. At the second jump he struck the intruder with all his weight, and sank his teeth into and through the many layers of wool that covered the man's right shoulder.

The peddler staggered back, yelling and striking wildly and uselessly with his left hand. The wolf dropped off, but only to spring again. His second grab caught in the same place; and at that moment the old man joined the fray. The peddler was screaming for help, screaming that the wolf would kill him, screaming prayers for mercy. Peter knocked his heels out from under him and knelt on his chest, and at the same time held Toby off with both hands.

Just then Paul Cherette came running, with Adelard close behind him.

"D'ye know him?" gasped Peter, struggling to keep the wolf from reaching the peddler's throat, and at the same time to keep the man from rising or drawing a weapon.

The lads looked, and their faces instantly went as gray as ashes. That was answer enough for the old man.

"I knowed it! Toby knowed it, too!" he cried. "Shut that door, you Paul! Fetch me somethin' to tie him with—them strings 'll do. Set on him, Adelard! Lay holt of Toby's collar, an' keep yer holt, or murder 'll be done! Git back there, Toby! Be good, ye devil! Gimme them thongs, Paul!"

In the meantime the peddler continued to cry for mercy, to plead to be saved from the wolf. He begged Adelard and Paul, by name, to save him from the wolf—to kill the wolf—to hold on to the beast, for

the love of God. They did not answer him, and kept their eyes averted.

"Here be yer rippin', snortin', rarin' *loup-garou!*" jeered Peter, rising from the chest of the bound and prostrate peddler. "Shut yer mouth, ye white-livered black-guard, or I'll let Toby at ye! If ye be a man, with a spark of manhood in ye, lay off that there beggin' an' whinin'! If ye be a wolf, turn into a wolf, damn ye for a blattin' sheep! Turn into a wolf, an' chaw up this here wolf of mine! For two brass buttons I'd leave him jump ye agin! Paul, go fetch yer pa here to take a look at the poor thing he's been runnin' away from all these years! Adelard, lay holt of Toby's collar!"

Paul went, and came back in five minutes with his father. Remie stood staring, his cheek bones bloodless above his beard, his eyes incredulous and horrified. The man on the floor met that look once, and then turned his head away and cursed venomously. Remie spoke a few words of his Quebec French with a dry tongue. The peddler cursed again in two languages.

"Ye dirty skunk!" exclaimed Peter. "Tell yer brother the truth about yerself, or, by the livin' desperation, I'll leave the wolf jump ye an' rip out yer gullet! I'd liefer see ye dead nor alive—an' that be God's truth, by the jumpin' cant hooks! Tell him the kinder *loup-garou* ye be, ye lyin', cheatin', black-hearted squirt! Then he'll maybe know the kinder damn fool he's been all these years, scarin' the tripe out of his wife an' children an' givin' the lie to a gentleman an' a scholar—the big ignorant lump of French pork! Spit it out, or ye be Toby's meat, as sure as yer name be Roger Cherette!"

He turned to Remie.

"Look at him! Look at yer *loup-garou!* Look at the thing ye give yer money to, an' run away from, an' 'poverished yer wife an' children for, an' had myself huntin' the woods for with two silver bullets in Sam Kell's old gun—ye poor God-forsook lump of skim-milk Quebec cheese!"

Silence reigned for thirty seconds. Then the old man took Adelard's place on the collar of the pulling wolf, and said grimly:

"Speak up, or he jumps!"

Roger confessed. The course of his confession was frequently interrupted by hysterical and blasphemous appeals to his brother for deliverance from the wolf and the old man; but Remie Cherette did not

answer with look or word. So labored and reluctant was the confession that Peter had to shout threats every minute or two, and twice allowed the wolf to advance a pace. The gist of it was as follows:

When Roger had first told his brother that the old curse was upon him, he had feared that he was telling what even simple Remie would not believe; but Remie had swallowed it without question, and Roger was not the man to neglect the cultivation of so easy a source of revenue as that. When Remie made the collecting difficult by running away, Roger became angry; and with each move his anger grew. At the same time, he still feared that even Remie's credulity would break some day under the stress of anger or of fear of total ruin; so that is why he bought a tame wolf from a man in Montreal. He hoped to be able, somehow or other, to confuse his own identity and that of the wolf in Remie's simple and credulous mind.

Beyond killing Remie's old dog, the beast had done nothing but eat and sleep and snarl at the hand that fed it; but Roger had kept it, for it had served him well in the slaying of the old dog, and he had made the most of that incident with a limp of one leg and bandages around his neck.

At this point Adelard spoke up. The dog Victor had fought with a big wolf before the fight in which he had received his death wounds, he said; and then, as later, Roger had appeared with his neck in bandages. Roger replied that he knew nothing of that, and that he had worn a bandage on that occasion because of a boil.

"Be this the same wolf ye bought in Montreal?" asked Peter.

With a blistering oath the man on the floor intimated that it was. He went on to say that it had escaped from him in October, at the mouth of Quatawamk, and that he wished he had beaten the life out of it when he had the chance.

This so enraged Peter Cronk that, but for the interference of Remie and Paul, he would have loosed his hold on the animal's collar. They dissuaded him from that grim act, but they did not cool his anger by doing so. He ordered Remie to take the blackguard out of his house, out of his sight, and clear out of the Snowshoe country.

"I do what you say, Peter," said Remie. "You been good friend to me, an' I been one damn fool! Roger, 'e is no *loup-garou*,

like M. Barnston say he don't be; but dat is not easy for me to believe so quick. I see now I run from nottin' all dat time, God forgive me!"

XVI

THE Cherettes led their kinsman away with his hands still tied; and Peter Cronk cooled himself off with a fresh brew of tea and a fresh fill of tobacco. The old man's rage soon passed under the influence of tea and tobacco. He fell to wondering at the fact that this Toby of his, this wolf that had come scratching and whining to his door, had once been Roger Cherette's wolf. It was strange, indeed, for the junction of the Quatawamk and Restigouche Rivers is a long and weary way from Snowshoe Lake. Chance, of course—but the old man saw the hand of God in it.

"He must 'a' beat ye crool, the way ye hates him," he said to Toby. "It wouldn't no more than sarved him right if ye'd ripped 'im open. I knowed ye'd come for a purpose when ye first come scratchin' at my door. It be a livin' wonder, an' no mistake! It do beat hell what the Almighty will do, an' the way He does it, when once He takes hold! In all my long life afore them Cherettes come to Snowshoe I never seen sich wonders an' mysteries as what I've saw since, an' all for the salvation of a selfish old man! It all started—this here savin' of my soul—with the queer feelin' in my brain years an' years ago. What 'll Richard say when he comes back an' hears how ye was Roger's wolf, an' how ye come here ahead of him so's to jump the skunk when he got here himself? He'll have a name for it out of a book, but all the books an' scholars in the world can't make it naught else but what it be—God's doin's! He'll sure have the laugh on Remie Cherette when he gits back. He'll be back before long, never fear!"

At that very moment the door flew open and in clattered Barnston, with his webs still on his feet and ice on his eyelashes.

"Where's he gone to?" he cried. "Where's the man with the Quebec rack-ets? I ran into his tracks and followed them in—right to this door!"

The old man and the wolf welcomed him like a long lost son.

"I knowed ye'd be back afore fly time!" cried Peter.

"You were wrong. I'd never have come back, but for those tracks. They led right

in here. Where the devil's he got to? Who was he?"

"He's came an' went, an' he won't trouble the Cherettes no more—not as a *loup-garou*, anyhow. It was that Roger, sure enough! He be no more a wolf nor I be, jist like you said. He walked right in on me, an' there was Toby chawin' at his shoulder quicker 'n I could grab an ax or he could pull a knife! Toby'd 'a' killed him, only we drug him off; an' he was that scairt, he told all about how he'd been makin' a fool an' a beggar of Remie all these years, with Remie an' the boys right here a listenin'. A *loup-garou*? Hell! Me an' Toby showed him up! Him turn into a wolf? If ever he was to turn into anything, it would be a rabbit!"

"Where is he now?"

"They took him away—Remie an' the lads. I told 'em to. What's yer hurry? I got somethin' else to tell ye." The old man grabbed Barnston with both hands and held him. "This here Toby uster be Roger's wolf. He got 'im off'n a man in Montreal. Toby left him last fall, on Quatawamk, an' come straight here, so's to be right here to jump him when he got here. What d'ye make of that? What would yer books call that?"

"Extraordinary, if true; but let me go. Very likely he's putting something over on that ignoramus this very minute. Remie Cherette's a fool! Come along over."

"Give it a name," stipulated Peter, "an' then I'll go with ye."

"Give what a name?"

"What I told ye about the wolf quittin' Roger Cherette on the Quatawamk an' bein' right here to jump him when he walked in on me."

"An extraordinary coincidence; but come along, or let me go!"

"It was the doin's of the Almighty!"

"Let's call it that and move along. All the more reason for us to lend a hand."

With that, Barnston dropped his pack to the floor and went out. Peter followed him a few minutes later, leaving the wolf alone in the cabin.

They found Roger Cherette in the kitchen, drinking tea and eating broiled venison and fried potatoes. He sat alone at the table, though it was set for five, and the family had not yet dined. His hands were free, and his webs and outer coat were off. Remie waited on him and talked to him, but the others stood away, eying him

with disgust and anger. At the moment of Barnston's entrance, the customary leer had returned to his evil face.

"I saw his tracks and came back," said the New Yorker to Mme. Cherette. He turned to the man at the table. "I thought you had gone. I've heard all about you. Hurry up with your dinner and get out!"

Roger glared at him for a second, and then glanced down at his plate; but in that second Richard saw uncertainty, fear, and desperation in those evil eyes.

"This is my house, and he eats my food," said Remie, in French.

"Your house!" retorted the sportsman, in English. "You are not to be trusted with a house. You are not fit to have a family. See what your wicked ignorance has brought your family to! You have let this faker rob you and chase you all over the country!" Again he looked at the man at the table. "I give you two hours. If you're not gone by then, I'll take you back to Montreal, where you're wanted more than you're wanted here!"

Roger's right hand slipped into the front of his coat, but Adelard, who had watched every move of his since his arrival, jumped and grabbed him by elbow and shoulder. The long knife was already out, but the grip on the man's shoulder caused the murderous fingers to relax, and the knife clattered on the floor.

Maintaining his merciless grip on the shoulder that the wolf's teeth had already bruised, Adelard forced his uncle back until he fell with a crash, breaking the chair beneath him. The women screamed. Young Paul leaped to his brother's assistance.

"He is not anxious to return to Montreal," said Barnston, significantly. "He would commit murder again rather than be taken to Montreal!"

Roger lay limp at that; and Adelard, kneeling on his chest and looking down into his eyes, saw that it was true.

Remie picked up the knife and stood turning it over and over and gazing at it with dull eyes for half a minute. Then he looked at Richard Barnston and said, in his mother tongue:

"This is worse than fear of the *loup-garou*! I beg you to be merciful, *monsieur*—merciful to this man, for our sakes. Had I not been so great a fool, and of such an ignorance, he might not have been so black a sinner. If you feel any friendship for this unfortunate family, you will let my

brother go free, and you will now leave us with our shame. "He will be gone within the hour, I promise you."

The young man went away without another word. He met Peter just outside and told the old man what had happened.

"He was putting it all over Remie when I got there," he said; "but when he pulled a knife on me, and I accused him of being wanted in Montreal for murder, the jig was up. I hit the nail on the head that time; but it wasn't a hard guess, after one good look at him."

"That's right," agreed Peter. "A man might feel kinder sorry for one of them there *loup-garous*, seein' how they can't help themselves once the curse be laid on them—if there ever happened to be sich a thing, which I ain't sayin', mind ye; but one shoot of the eye at that there Roger be enough to dry up all the milk of human kindness in the angel of mercy!"

"It hasn't that effect on Remie Cherette," returned Barnston. "That fellow's too soft to live in this world. He realizes what a fool he's been, and what a mess he's made of things, and he feels worse at discovering his brother to be a thieving liar and blackguard than if he were really a *loup-garou*. I can understand that, but he will give the brute every cent he has in the house, and forgive him for ruining himself and his family—you mark my words! That's being too confoundedly soft to be fair."

"Leave him be," said Peter. "What money he's got left won't matter much, one way or t'other, I reckon. Ye can't make a wise man out of a crazy Frenchman all in ten minutes. He feels worse at findin' his brother a black murderer nor a cursed *loup-garou*, do he? Well, it warn't so long ago he was nigh demented with fear of the *loup-garou*! He's sure got a soft heart, has Remie, but I ain't yet quite forgive him for pullin' the trigger on poor Toby. If it hadn't been for Toby, we might all be layin' dead with our throats cut this very minute. If Toby hadn't jumped quick an' straight, he'd sure 'a' had me with that big knife!"

They went home; and every few minutes one or the other went out and around the corner to a spot from which he had an unobstructed view of the Cherette farmstead. When the hour was about up, they went out together, leaving the wolf clawing at the inside of the door; and, sure enough,

there was Roger Cherette heading across the clearing, with his peddler's pack on his shoulder. They returned to the hot stove.

A few minutes later the door opened, and Paul Cherette entered with a holiday face. He was in high spirits. Richard Barnston's arguments had shaken his faith in *loup-garous*, 'tis true; but it had been a great relief to him to see with his own eyes and feel with his own hands that his terrible uncle was nothing more than a very inferior sort of man, and thus to know that the old curse of the Cherettes had been nothing worse than a nightmare.

The boy told his friends of Roger's prayers and tears, and how his mother and Jeanne had left the kitchen for shame of the man's shamelessness, and how his father had hidden his eyes with his hand and trembled like a leaf. He told them of Adelard's actions and words when Remie was on the point of giving the despicable trickster one-half of all the money he possessed. Adelard, it seemed, had stepped forward and snatched the money from his father, crying:

"Give him all the food he can carry, but if you add another dollar to the thousands he's robbed us of, it'll be when I'm dead!"

Paul had backed Adelard in that. When Roger had put bacon and tea and sugar and a bottle of rum into his peddler's pack, without so much as a word of thanks, and was fully convinced that not a dollar in cash was coming to him, the tears and prayers ceased, the sinister glimmer returned to his eyes, and the wicked grin came back to his lips. When the pack was in its place, and his webs were on his feet, and he was all ready to step out, he pulled out a leather wallet and flipped it open for just long enough to give them a glimpse of some yellow bills. He showed them all his pointed teeth; and then, with a hand on the latch, he said:

"There are other ways of getting money than scaring it out of a fool, but that was the easiest way!"

And out he went.

"Let us hope that he keeps right on going," said Barnston, at the conclusion of Paul's dramatic talk. "He's a dangerous man. I'll take a look around to-morrow morning, and follow him out a few miles, just to make sure that he's gone. That conscienceless brute is more to be feared than fifty *loup-garous*!"

"It be a pity they didn't leave me und Toby when we had him right here on the floor," said Peter Cronk.

Roger Cherette did not go far on his outward journey that afternoon. He traveled three miles, muttering fiendishly to himself all the way, and now and again turning and shaking a fist in the direction of the clearings; and then he made camp.

He trembled with rage as with an ague. He had flashed paper money at the men back there, but twenty dollars was the extent of it. The city of Montreal was shut to him now. For that matter, every city and every town would be a trap for him until he was forgotten by the police, and that might be a long time.

He had not wanted money this time from Remie, but a home where he could hide in safety—and money later, of course; and he had been given one hour's hospitality!

The pan shook in his hand as he fried the bacon.

XVII

WHILE Peter Cronk and Richard Barnston sat at supper that evening—with Toby, the wolf, between them, ready for everything that came his way—the old man looked at the young man often and quizzically, and questioned and talked in a vein that did not seem to be entirely in accord with the latter's mood.

"Would ye 'a' come back if ye hadn't run into them tracks?" he asked.

Barnston shook his head. He turned a questioning glance on the old man, but shifted it to the handleless cup which served as a sugar bowl and added more sugar to his untasted coffee.

"Ye be a hog for sweetenin'," remarked Peter. "That makes four spoonfuls."

"Help yourself," returned the other in a detached voice.

"Wouldn't ye never 'a' come back to Snowshoe but for them tracks?"

"Why should I?"

"I dunno. Ye act like ye had somethin' on yer mind, lad."

That was received in silence.

"Them Cherettes ain't a bad family, only that there Roger, an' I reckon they be quit of him. Remie be kinder foolish, but mighty good-hearted. The woman ain't got her equal at cookin' in the province. Adelard an' Paul be honest an' smart young fellers. The girl's got as pretty a face an'

as ye a temper as ever I see; but they be bus' whackers, one an' all, without manners or 'look larnin'."

"Their manners are very good!" said Richard, almost with asperity. "Even Remie's manners are better than those of dozens of educated people I've met, though he is a superstitious fool. The children have had some schooling, too. The girl reads in both languages, and has three or four very good books. I find Mme. Cherette rather a superior woman—certainly superior to women of her class in small townships. It isn't all peasant blood in her veins."

"She be a grand cook, anyhow. They be good company on Snowshoe; but they wouldn't be so good in New York, I reckon."

Barnston said nothing to that, but went to the door, and out into the cold, and looked across at the Cherette house.

"I feel uneasy about that fellow Roger," he said, upon his return to the table. "He is bad and in a desperate temper. If he has walked quietly off, I miss my guess. I wish I had followed him this afternoon!"

"Seein' how consarned ye be over them Cherettes, it be a livin' wonder ye went away this mornin' like ye done," observed Peter.

"Living wonder be damned!" exclaimed the other angrily. "What the devil are you talking about? I set out this morning to rid myself of Remie's low suspicions—and yours, too; and I came back because I guessed the truth about the tracks I ran across, and was anxious to help those people. I'd do the same for any people who had been as nice to me as Mme. Cherette and her daughter and sons have been. I don't blame the family for Remie's ignorant and vulgar mind. Do you think I'd let them be murdered in their beds—for Roger Cherette would do it as quick as he'd wink—just because an ignoramus like Remie doesn't understand me? Is that what you think of me? Your opinion of me doesn't seem to be much higher than that fool Remie's!"

"Ye ain't got no call to be riled at me, Dick, for I got a derved good opinion of ye. Ye be young, but I don't see much else wrong with ye."

"I'll outgrow that, I suppose."

Between then and ten o'clock, Barnston went out a dozen times to look across at the lighted window of the Cherette kitchen.

Once he went all the way to the house, and made a circuit of it and the barns.

It was midnight when he awoke suddenly and sat up, wondering what had wakened him. It had been a sound, it was not repeated. He did not sit and wonder for long, but threw aside his blankets, swung to the floor, and lit the lantern. He saw the wolf sniffing at the bottom of the door.

"What be the trouble now?" queried Peter from the lower bunk.

"I don't know yet," replied Richard, pulling on his shoepacks. "I'm going to find out. Something woke me up with a start."

"Maybe it was a yell—a yell out of somebody bein' murdered!" cried the old man, jumping out of his blankets and grabbing for his largest pair of boots. "Look at Toby, will ye? Wait for me! I'll be ready in two ticks."

The New Yorker neither waited nor answered, but picked up an ax and sped from the cabin, leaving the door wide open. The wolf leaped after him and past him.

Richard had not put on his webs, for there was a beaten path between the habitations. He ran, though at first he neither saw nor heard anything alarming, but before he had gone a hundred yards he saw a light in the darkness ahead that was not that of a lamp or a lantern.

When he reached the house, flames were flickering up all the four log walls and licking under the eaves. He tried the door, and found it fastened. He swung his ax—swung it again and again, shouting at each blow; and at last the door sagged loose.

He flung it down, and a cloud of smoke gulched out and rolled over him. The fire had worked in between the roof and the top logs of the walls. He staggered in across the prostrate door, shouting and gasping.

Fortunately, none of the Cherettes slept in the loft. The house contained two rooms besides the kitchen, the pantry and the storeroom. In the nearer of these the parents slept. Jeanne had her bed in the farther one, and Adelard and Paul had bunks in a corner of the sizable kitchen; but so heavily had they slept—drugged, perhaps, by the smoke oozing down from the burning loft—that even the boys did not fully regain consciousness and realize their peril until the door was tottering. Then they staggered up and stumbled, choking, across the threshold; but they turned again in a

minute, and dashed into the smoke after Barnston.

The rescuer dragged the man and woman out of bed with a violence that shocked their brains wide awake. He flung open the inner door and stumbled around the walls of the little room until he fell over Jeanne's narrow cot. Then he gathered her up in his arms, bedclothes and all, and staggered out and fell into a snow bank, unconscious. Peter arrived at that moment.

They could not save the house, despite the fact that there was no wind; but clothing and bedding, the molasses jug, a bag of beans, and two bags of flour were carried out. Finally Remie got a twitching chain around the stove, and a long rope tied to the chain, and hitched the snorting old horses on and fetched that household treasure out to safety, bumping and clattering and disgorging its own fire, just as the roof fell in with a roar.

The women went to Peter's cabin, accompanied by Remie, who carried his rifle and peered about him, ready to shoot at anything that looked like a man. He realized that but for Richard Barnston's vigilance, activity, and courage, he and his would now be lying under the red ruins of his house. He knew that the fire had started outside, on all the walls, and that dry brushwood had been piled against the logs to feed it. His soft heart was hard at last.

The four others retired to the narrow threshing floor of the barn, where the salvaged provisions were already stored, and made beds for themselves of hay and blankets and fur robes. In the morning they would stuff up the widest of the surrounding cracks, establish the rescued stove, and be snug enough; but in the meantime they were not in danger of freezing, or even in serious discomfort.

Barnston could not sleep. A light had burst upon him during his struggle into and out of the burning house. It had disclosed to him and illuminated for him a stupendous and beautiful and glorious thing; and his heart and nerves and mind were still dazzled.

After lying outwardly still for an hour, he slipped from his nest of hay and wool, took up an ax, and stole from the barn. The log walls of the house were still burning, but with only an occasional low burst of sparks. The icy air was windless. As he paused for a moment in the glow of the

great fire, the thought came to him that he had not seen the wolf since the instant of its passing him just outside Peter's door. This thought held a corner of his mind for a few seconds, while he looked to right and left over the red glare on the snow, and then passed utterly.

He moved on; and until dawn he did sentry-go, ax on shoulder, around and around the humble cabin that sheltered Jeanne Chérette. Once—though Richard was not aware of it—Remie Chérette peered out at him through a peephole in the frost of the little window, and had the rifle halfway to his shoulder before recognizing him. The recognition brought a softening glow to Remie's newly hardened heart.

The wolf had circled the blazing house once, with his muzzle to the snow, and then had gone leaping off across the clearing. The track was deep and fresh; and it was the track of the man who had tied him and beaten him a score of times without cause.

Upon regaining his blink of a fire, Roger Chérette kicked up a little flame to light him to his pack, which lay a few yards off, and to the bottle inside the pack. The bottle was already half empty. He drew the cork with his pointed teeth and gulped the strangling liquor.

Presently he got the pack on his back. He stooped to tighten a frozen thong of his right snowshoe; and as he stood straight he uttered a scream that rang against the frosty stars. He staggered heavily and fell, struggling and choking—and presently lay still.

The wolf curled up beside the fallen fire and slept until dawn.

XVIII

THE new day lifted along the east as clear and colorless as glass. Richard Barnston cast aside his ax, and rubbed ice from his eyelashes and frost from his lips and chin. He would have been frozen stiff, despite his inner fire, but for the number and thickness of the layers of wool in which he had clothed himself against a night in the fireless barn.

The east was taking on tints of gold and rose when a plume of smoke went up from the chimney. He stepped to the door then, and rapped on it with a mittened hand. It was opened a crack, and Remie's bearded face appeared cautiously.

"*Entrez, monsieur,*" said Remie, stepping back.

He held his rifle, which had not been out of his hand for a moment since his coming to Peter's cabin. He closed the door behind Barnston. Mme. Chérette was at the stove, and Jeanne was sitting up in the lower bunk. The early visitor removed his fur cap and looked from Jeanne to her mother and from the mother to the father. They all gazed back at him. Presently he steadied his gaze on Remie's face.

"I hope that you—do not dislike me—as you have seemed to, recently," he said. "You distrusted me—but why, Heaven knows! I don't believe in *loup-garous*, true; but that is not a sin. I—I have been thoughtless; but last night I thought, or something thought for me—I don't know."

"I see you wid an ax, out in the dark an' cold," said Remie, smiling gravely.

"That is true. I stood guard—for Jeanne's sake. I love her with all my heart, and I mean to win her love. If you dislike me, or distrust me, it is a pity; but nothing in this world can drive me away from her now!"

"I was wrong," said Remie. "You are brave an' good, an' 'ave save our lives an' our souls. I was scare of everyt'ing. I distrust everyt'ing; but when I look t'rough de little 'ole on de frosty window, an' see *monsieur* wid dat ax, I distrust no more."

The New Yorker looked at Mme. Chérette, who was smiling at him. He took a few slow steps toward her, trying to think of something to say, and trying to muster courage to look past the mother at the face of the girl in the bunk.

The door opened behind him, and Peter and the wolf entered, but he did not turn his head. He was spellbound by his tremendous, all-absorbing emotion. He was like one bewitched.

"Here he was waitin' at the door," said the old man. "He was up to some devilment last night, I bet a dollar. There be blood froze on his collar. Did ye kill a buck, Toby lad?"

But nobody gave a look or a thought to the wolf, who padded to his place behind the little stove and curled up and closed his yellow eyes.

Barnston halted stiffly before Mme. Chérette and said, loud enough to be heard through log walls:

"I love your daughter!"

Then, as if the words had been magic, he cast off his embarrassment, seized the laughing woman in his arms, and kissed her. Then he freed her, and extended open arms toward the bunk.

"I knowed it!" cried Peter Cronk. "I knowed it the first time he saw Jeanne!"

Then, because of a sudden sense of absolute relief and security, Remie Cherette laughed loud and long.

Curiosity had at last overcome Tom Breen's laziness and cowardice, and he had set out to follow that formidable and mys-

terious peddler in to Snowshoe, in the hope of learning what it was all about.

He came upon the peddler suddenly in the early morning. For a minute he stood staring, and then advanced fearfully. He looked at the fellow's torn throat, and at the footprints of the wolf. Terror shook him, but his greed was stronger than his terror. He rifled the pack and emptied the dead man's pockets. Then he started for home on the jump.

Snow fell that day, and all night and the next day, and Roger Cherette's body was buried deep till spring.

THE END

AFTER THE FIRST SNOW FELL

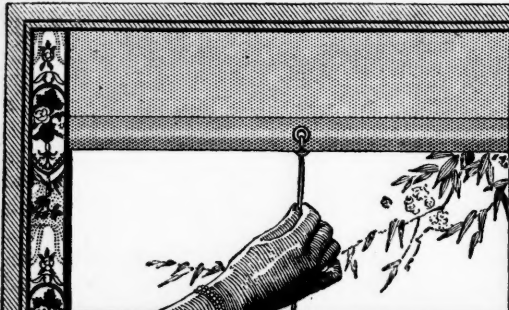
AFTER the first snow fell, and skies were cold,
There came a mellow day, a day of gold;
The few last blossoms, of the sunlight fain,
Looked up and smiled again
As if in a sweet surcease after pain.

We took the climbing path, my love and I.
A lonely tree stood clear against the sky;
Our tree we called it, for beneath its shade,
Thick boughs that interbraid,
We oftentimes had lingered, man and maid.

Again we lingered; precious memories
Clustered about us as do swarming bees
Round a bloom-laden honeysuckle spray;
The drifting golden day
Declined the while we said what lovers say.

The golden day declined; my sweet and I
The closer drew in tender ecstasy;
Love wrought for us so magical a spell
After the first snow fell
That there were nearer, dearer things to tell!

Clinton Scollard



FOR
LOVELY
HOMES

Hartshorn

SHADE ROLLERS
and SHADE FABRICS

ESTABLISHED 1860